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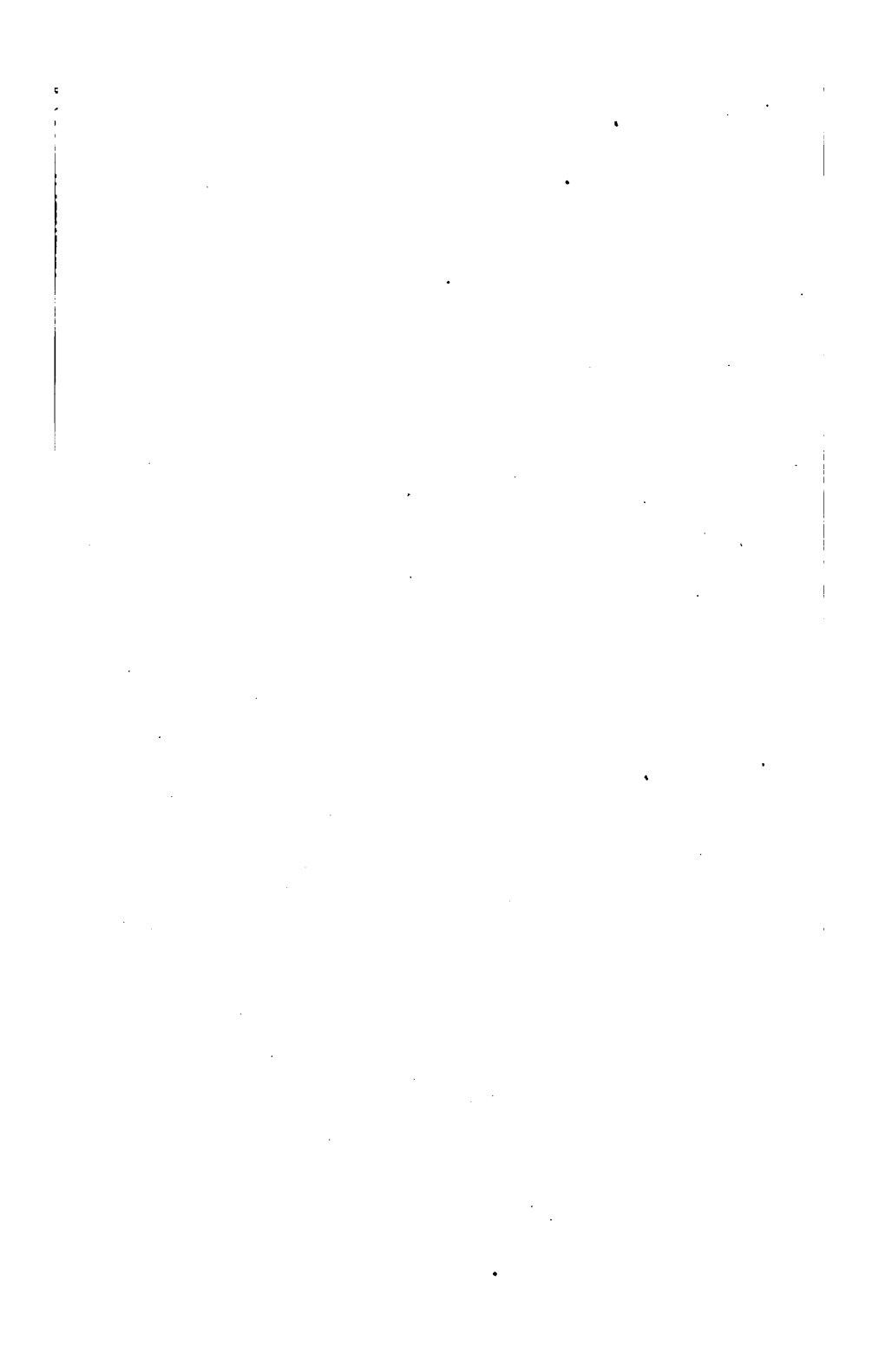
PERILS.



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PERILS:

A NOVEL.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"REMINISCENCES OF A LAWYER."

VOL. I.



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PREFACE.

MAN is and ever must be in this life beset with "Perils."

Surely, however, there never was a time when those perils were graver or more subtle than the present.

Socially and morally they literally swarm around us.

But far above all, staring us broadly and unblushingly in the face, is the peril of "Free-thinking," as it is termed—a spirit of egotism, misplaced self-reliance, and negation of the simple and pure faith of Christianity as inculcated by Him who veiled not its power in obscurity, nor erected any barrier to its pursuit by the lowly and unlearned.

The marvellous development of man's intellectual powers in arts and science, and his deep research into things, which, to our forefathers, were hidden and mysterious, have given birth to this dangerous spirit, which threatens to shake to its foundations the Christian creed.

Man, justly proud of his skill and learning, flattered and caressed by the multitude, has fallen away from Him who endowed him with all his talents and faculties ; and because he has traced, as he thinks, many hidden things of the past to their first causes, and has accounted for their existence by what he calls *natural* means, has wilfully ignored " Nature's God ; " and thus his pride has led him into the " strong delusion," as St. Paul has it, " that he can make himself equal with God."

It is very sad, nay, awful, even to think of

such a state of things, but daily experience, in our intercourse with man, force upon one the conviction that this is no exaggeration.

It cannot be denied that we have good and earnest men amongst us, but their teachings and writings, if listened to or read at all, are speedily forgotten and thrown aside.

Alas! it is too true also that, while there are many efforts made to counteract the rapidly increasing tide of virtual atheism, there is but little unity of action, though the purpose and intention may be the same.

The Church is rent asunder by its internal divisions, and men who style themselves "Churchmen" are as bitter and intolerant to each other as they are towards those who, differing with them in forms and ceremonies, equally claim the privilege of being members of the Universal Church of Christ.

It is not the clergy and ministers of religion only to whom belongs the duty to stand up bravely and manfully for the maintenance of the true faith as it is in Jesus ;—the laity can do much good and honest work by precept as well as by example.

When we read of the meetings, and the speeches made at them, so constantly, it might be inferred that there never was more religious vitality than at the present time.

Statesmen and politicians talk about it, and declare their earnestness and zeal in the promotion of education and in the amelioration of the condition of the people ; but they, like the clergy, make religion the subject of angry debate, and strive to carry out their own whims and caprice, enforcing their opinions by injudicious recrimination tending to disturb and destroy that great unity of

purpose which is so essential to the advancement of any cause, religious or secular.

Every thoughtful Christian must lament that charity, in its full and ample meaning, does not more frequently influence the hearts and govern the actions of such men, who, while honestly anxious to promote the cause which they ostensibly support, really damage it by uncharitable "sayings and doings."

While, then, they are quarrelling with, and satirizing one another over minor and comparative insignificant questions, men outside the arena of their contests wonder at the bitterness and invective introduced into the subject of man's duty to his God and his neighbour, where all should be peace and concord—and so, vast numbers who have thought little enough of the matter before, point at those divisions and the discord amongst

learned divines, and consider that if Christianity is thus correctly illustrated, they will be no followers of it.

Indifference being thus generated is rapidly followed by antagonism, and men's minds, deprived of all foundation for their faith, drift unguardedly and thoughtlessly away into positive and practical atheism.

Away, then, with idle discussions as to forms and ceremonies!

Ye priests and ministers of the simple Gospel of your Saviour, set the example of forbearance and tolerance, and sink your hostilities and differences as to vestments and other really unimportant matters.

Put on and exhibit the robe of Charity, and prove by your own respect for others' opinions, that its purity and unsoiled folds are not only emblematic of your great Master's cause, but

that its assumption has induced you to zealously strive to lead others to seek first the Kingdom of God, without hesitation, without reservation, and with simplicity and purity of heart.

“ Up, priest, and gird thee,
Day is grown mirk,
Night will come soon,
When no one can work.

* * *

Ah! priests why wrangle ye,
Patching old creeds,
Uprooting and rending
Flowers with the weeds;
Twisting and tearing
The Bible apart,
Suiting each baby priest's
Whimsical heart?
What of the wanderers
Out in the cold?
While ye are wrangling,
Losing the day,
What of the little ones
Going astray?” *

* Fredk. E. Weatherly, M.A.

Up, too, ye laymen, who have the simple and pure faith of your blessed Redeemer engrafted in your hearts.

Cast away from you all minor differences and divisions to increase that faith.

And oh, priests and laymen, too ! strive with all your might to crush the increasing infidelity of the age, and thus in some measure mitigate, if you cannot entirely disperse, some of the *perils* which its continuance must inevitably multiply and render more and more dangerous to man's temporal and eternal welfare.

PERILS.

CHAPTER I.

EDWARD GREVILLE and Walter Liddon had both nearly completed their education at Harrow. Being about the same age, and having, during their school terms, been boarders in the same house, they had been of necessity, for several years, brought into close contact with each other.

Greville's father was a very wealthy colliery proprietor ; Mrs. Greville had died some six years prior to the period to which I refer, after having given birth to a daughter, who, with Edward Greville, were the only issue of

Mrs. Greville's marriage with their father ; and the latter, since his wife's death, had remained a widower.

Walter Liddon was the only son of a retired merchant, who, in comparatively early life, had amassed a large fortune by his own sheer hard work, pluck, and perseverance ; and upon the income derived from which, he was enabled to maintain a handsome establishment.

The two boys were as differently constituted in their personal *physique*, as they were in their ideas, pursuits, and aspirations.

Edward Greville was a robust, sturdy boy, with a frame which bore the promise of his developing into a powerful man. He was rather under, than over the ordinary height ; his face was full of vivacity and life, though even at his early age there would at times

steal over his countenance a shadow of discontent and apparent uneasiness and disquietude when engaged in his school duties; and if corrected for negligence, or confined to the house for breach of discipline or otherwise, a malevolent spirit would display itself in his sparkling black eye. He was a general favourite, however, with his schoolfellows, as his disposition naturally was a generous one. By the younger boys he was looked up to and admired as one of the best cricketers of his day, and his glory was at its height when he had, on one occasion, by a splendid display of batting at "Lords," literally saved his school's defeat in one of the great public school matches of the year.

Walter Liddon was a tall, thin, delicate lad, naturally of very refined manners and tastes, though not over apt or quick at learning; and

while Greville (who was on the same form with him) would readily acquire and master his task, Liddon would toil for hours laboriously, but perseveringly, to obtain the mastery of the same papers. This rule held good in all their exercises, except those that had reference to religious subjects.

Greville shirked all his work that related to these, as much as possible, and the stolid indifference he would put on when required to construe Greek Testament or any Sacred Writer, surprised and pained his master. He was reasoned with, and urged to say why this was so, but no persuasion or argument resulted in obtaining any satisfactory explanation; punishment only made him more dogged, and when he was pressed to tell why, if he could translate Homer with ease and fluency, he could not, at least with equal facility, construe

the simple Gospels of the Greek Testament, he was silent.

His father called himself a "Churchman," contributed liberally towards the relief and maintenance of the poor of the parish in which he resided, and his rector's appeals for other parochial help were never made to him in vain; and though it was well known that he openly scoffed at religious ceremonies and services, he had caused his son Edward to be baptized into the Christian faith, and himself stood as one of the sponsors at the baptismal font.

Walter Liddon, happily for him, had parents of another mould, and he had had deeply impressed on his mind, that his first great care in life should be to fulfil his duty to his God. The good seed thus sown in his heart almost from the time that he could lisp

God's Holy Name, and lift his little hands in prayer to Him at his mother's knee, had fructified, and the whole tenor of even this period of his life seemed to be influenced by a gentle, placid, and tranquil manner, which the storms of disappointment, youthful troubles, or angry words from others, were unable to ruffle. Still he was a brave boy, and could hold his own in the cricket field and all other manly pursuits.

It was somewhat singular, then, that with such opposite characters, Edward Greville and Walter Liddon should have formed a sincere and honest friendship for each other, though, much to young Liddon's sorrow, there was *the* one subject upon which Greville would never allow him to touch, and that was "Religion!" and when, on one occasion, Liddon had said "Do, my dear Greville, let

me say a few words to you on that subject which so deeply concerns your present and future happiness, and let me implore you to tell me what it is that makes you almost fiercely repel me when I even venture to refer to God or the Bible?" Greville replied in harsh and passionate tones—

"Walter Liddon, we have, I believe, conceived a sincere liking and friendship for each other; if it is to continue here, and, when we enter upon life, if these sentiments are to follow us there, Religion must be a forbidden ground between us. I know much of your ideas on the subject. I will not say I respect them, but I admire your consistency, and I would not wound or hurt your feelings by saying what might shock as well as pain you."

From that time, this all-absorbing and

important subject was for years a dead letter between the two friends, though the time was to come when Greville looked back with a shudder at the fearful *perils* he had courted by his unaccountable and extraordinary infidelity, and when he would have given, could he have so done, some of the best years of his life, had he earlier listened to the gentle remonstrances of Walter Liddon.

Both having completed their school probation, left Harrow for their respective homes, and as the Grevilles lived chiefly at their family seat in the north of England, and the Liddons resided in Berkshire, the friends became temporarily separated by many miles, though they kept up a tolerably constant correspondence, and each usually spent at the other's house, some pleasant days together every year, and thus continued and fostered

the friendship for each other which they had conceived during their school career.

Of course Greville, with his opinions and predilections, had, with his father's consent, elected not to go to either of the Universities, and, after having left Harrow, he had for several years spent his time in travelling on the Continent, lavishing the very liberal allowance made him by his father, in what he was pleased to term "enjoying life while he might," and construing the "*dum vivimus vivamus*" maxim as meaning the pursuit of a large proportion of the vices of the age.

For a time, while under the family roof, he had reluctantly conformed to the outward acknowledgment of the duties of religion, because it was "the respectable thing" to go to church once a week on the Sunday mornings; but shortly after attaining his majority,

he made no secret of his sentiments, and cared not who knew that he was in fact a "Freethinker," in other words, if not entirely, almost a practical Atheist!

Blessed with vigorous health, but governed and guided alone by his own thoughts, ideas, and conclusions; without the acknowledgment of a Supreme Being who only can define the boundaries between good and evil; and with ample worldly means and opportunities at his command, the demon, "Pride," whispered to him that his possessions were no more than his *right*, and inwardly flattering himself that at least a long term of life was to be his, he still, as in early days, recklessly and defiantly rejected even the harbouring of a thought that the "talents" with which he was entrusted were simply gifts from a higher power, to be used, and not abused—and so

he thus aggravated the *perils* which surrounded his career in life, perversely and wickedly thrusting from him the only safeguard and protection against them—the trust and confidence in the aid of an Almighty Hand.

Notwithstanding Walter Liddon's prospects of wealth were very considerable he felt that to be an *idle man* was wrong, and though his pure character, and humble, but earnest culture of religious principles, and daily exercise of them, pointed out the Church as a field for his career in life, an unfortunate impediment in his speech deterred him from hazarding the performance of the public duties which that profession would require, lest he should break down in it.

He somewhat sorrowfully came to this conclusion—he had hoped that the defective

tongue might have been corrected, but when, after much and patient effort to effect a cure, he remained unsuccessful, he meekly submitted to the Divine decree.

Commercial pursuits were not in accordance with his tastes, and, after thoughtful conversation with his parents, who fully recognized and appreciated his feelings, and anxiety to become a useful member of society, it was finally determined that he should enter the medical profession.

"The field afforded to the surgeon," he had said to his father, "to relieve distress, and assist the poor and needy, is a grand one, and I feel it would be congenial to my mind to work in such an arena."

"Let it be so, then, Walter," his father replied. "Though you have selected a profession, the pursuit of which will involve you

in much care and anxiety, your mother's and my confidence in you, and your goodness of heart is such, that we are satisfied your own clear and right reasoning has not only led you to select a vocation in which you will honestly do your duty to those who seek your professional assistance, but in which also you may exercise all the beneficence and charity which it is our happiness to know you possess."

Walter accordingly forthwith commenced his studies for the medical profession with one of its learned and eminent members, and it need hardly be said that he pursued them with zeal and assiduity, foreshadowing a result, on their completion, creditable both to himself and his instructor.

During the succeeding six years, Edward Greville and Walter Liddon had only met at

rare intervals, but their kindly feelings towards, and interest in, each other had remained unshaken.

The elder Greville had died, and been consigned with great pomp and state to his last earthly resting-place, while his son, Edward, had succeeded, subject to a handsome provision for his only sister, to all that great wealth which his ancestor had not brought into the world, and not one tittle of which could he take with him into the great unknown hereafter.

Walter Liddon had completed his apprenticeship, had passed his examination with credit, and had returned home to assist, for the time being, his former master in the extensive practice he was carrying on in the neighbourhood.

And so the two friends were fairly launched into the world with its *perils* surrounding them.

How will they meet them ?

CHAPTER II.

THE early part of the month of May, 1866, dawned upon the world full of disaster and panic to commercial interests, and pregnant with sorrow and suffering to investors of capital, and the widow and orphan.

It was a pleasant afternoon the 7th of that month at Walter Liddon's home.

It was the family custom to dine at five o'clock, when he had returned from the duties of the day.

The dinner had been removed, and the elder Liddon, his wife, and son, were sitting chatting over the dessert in the dining-room, of ordinary events, and the current topics of the day.

The view from this room was very attractive—the extensive lawn, with artistic beds of early spring flowers just claiming their privilege from Nature to display their varied and brilliant blossoms, and gathering additional beauty from the rays of the sun which, occasionally chequered by light and fleecy clouds, whose shadows chased each other across the landscape, produced a cheerful foreground, while the soft breeze of early spring created, as it were, life and animation amongst the pear, plum, and cherry trees, as they waved to and fro in graceful motion, shaking their white plumes as if rejoicing in their garb of purity.

These evidences of the resurrection of the vitality of Nature from its winter's shroud, with the merry carol of the birds, the inevitable hum of the busy bee, and the air redolent

of pleasant perfume, were calculated to impress their witnesses with a placid and tranquil feeling, and to add to the quiet happiness of a home such as Liddon's, where that happiness was generated by mutual affection and confidence, and promoted and purified by the spirit and practice of true religion.

The parish in which the Liddons residence was situated was an extensive one, its cottages and dwellings being scattered, though numerous, while their inmates were principally composed of agricultural labourers, whose means of subsistence were scanty, and in the cases of large families of young children barely sufficient to provide the common necessities of life—where sickness or suffering occurred, but for the charity and benevolence of the landowners and other opulent people

of the neighbourhood, their distress would have been great.

Unfortunately this is too frequently the case of the agricultural labourer ; still it is forgotten, and by political agitators wilfully ignored, that though the actual wages of this class of working men are so much less than the employés in the manufacturing districts and large towns generally, the agricultural labourer has many privileges which the former do not possess, and more especially has the latter aid and comforts for himself and his family from the house of the squire, which do not fall to the lot of those who are toilers in the close and stifling atmosphere of the manufactory, and too frequently dwellers in the crowded and foetid air of dark and gloomy tenements.

Mr. Liddon was not a landed proprietor,

he having invested the whole of his accumulated property in one of the most extensive commercial houses in the United Kingdom, a house which for many years was one of the safest and soundest in the world, but which, alas! was now tottering to its base! and whose fall was to bring woe to many a family!

The poor of the parish of Mr. Liddon's adoption knew him, his wife, and son, as some of their most charitable and sympathising benefactors—Mr. Liddon, it is true, in consequence of very delicate health could not personally visit his neighbours so much as his philanthropic heart prompted him to do, but his purse was always open to aid any real cause of distress or suffering; and his was not mere "giving of his goods to feed the poor," without his heart going out with the

gift, but having thoroughly mastered and understood the circumstances under which his assistance had been sought, and satisfied himself that the case was a deserving one, he gave not only freely and liberally, but *heartily*.

Mrs. Liddon entirely reciprocated and concurred in her husband's sentiments, and she was ever the ready and cheerful dispenser of *his* charity, while her own private resources were frequently called in aid for similar purposes.

As for Walter, his pleasant face and gentle voice were ever welcome in the cottages of the poor—the sick and the sorrowful hailed his advent with joy.

He was skilful in his profession, and his poorer brethren were treated with as much tenderness, consideration, and attention as those of high degree—his ear was open to listen to and sympathise with them in their

distress, and he, like his parents, never failed to prove the sincerity of his sympathy by affording substantial relief to the deserving.

With these attributes and surroundings, then what wonder that the Liddon family's lives flowed onward in peacefulness and tranquility, and that the constant practice of their love and charity to others should have elicited those responsive feelings in their hearts which bound them to each other by the tenderest ties of affection.

"Your friend, Greville," said Mr. Liddon to his son, "has been somewhat parsimonious of his correspondence with you recently, has he not, Walter?"

"Well, yes," replied Walter, "it is now some two months since I heard from him. I have been somewhat anxious to have a letter from him, telling me how his proposed scheme

for improving his workmen's dwellings (on which subject he spoke warmly in his last) is progressing; he promised to submit his plans to me; for after all, without flattering myself, I think he pins his faith on my judgment and approval in many things, and I confess I admire his generous nature."

"But Walter," said Mrs. Liddon, "how is it, think you, that he with his professed atheistical tendencies, practically exhibits so good a heart, and a thoughtfulness for others, to my mind, so entirely inconsistent with a want of faith in a Higher power from whence alone these good influences flow?"

"My dear mother," answered Walter, "it is an enigma in his character I cannot solve."

"But did you never draw any explanation from him of his reasons for this repudiation of faith?" said Mrs. Liddon.

“Once only,” replied Walter, “and it led to a discussion between us which ended with anger on his part and with regret on mine; for I felt, and still feel, that there is dormant in him much that is good, and possessing an element of holy aspirations which requires but the spark of some sentiment which he does not at present grasp, to develop the latent fire which once opportunely touched, would ignite with a healthy and vigorous glow, and *that* once produced, the feeling would be so new and surprising to him that he would hold it firmly, and having nourished it in his heart, he would speedily be compelled to acknowledge that he had long erringly smothered a flame which must purify his heart, and lead him on ultimately to the recognition of a Divine Hand as the creator of this newly-discovered sentiment of faith in Him.”

“Holy aspirations ! you say, Walter,” suggested Mrs. Liddon, “don’t you think it somewhat anomalous that a heart that professes to deny, and therefore to defy, a Supreme Being, would at the same time be touched with any holy *thought* ?”

“I think you will see, dear mother,” replied Walter “that I did not quite put it in the form that you have done, as one of holy *thought* ; at any rate I did not mean to convey that even the *thought* had yet been born. It is somewhat difficult for me to put in words with exactness the impression I have on my mind, but I may illustrate it thus—the discovery of the wonderful power of steam, for instance, was, as have been many other marvellous discoveries, the result of an accident—the *power* existed, but its discoverer dreamt not of it until, we are told, he observed the move-

ment of the lid of a kettle, caused first by the condensation of the steam in the kettle, and then by its escape and evaporation, and the consequent movement of the lid necessary for its escape—the discovery of this hitherto latent power created in the mind of the discoverer a new field for research—the little jet of steam was to be tremendously multiplied, the pressure of the condenser was to be increased, and the marvellous power was to be utilised for the comparative annihilation of space and for the production of such extraordinary results as the mind of man had never previously contemplated or believed possible, so, I think, Greville has a *latent* sentiment at present undeveloped, choked and stifled it may be by his pride and egotism.”

“I sincerely trust you may be right,” said Mr. Liddon, “for many reasons, but especially

for his sister's sake—alone in the world as she is with him, she seems to deeply feel her brother's contempt for religion. She must be now nearly out of her teens, and I hear she is a good and religious girl—and it cannot be otherwise than that it should touch her gentle nature that her *only* near relative, possessed, as you say, of a generous heart, and with the power and ability to confer so many blessings upon his fellow-men, should lack the one great thing needful. I am often tempted to wish that a chastening hand should bring him and such as he is into trouble or affliction, or that they should be mercifully visited with sickness, that so they might be brought to feel how little they are, and how utterly useless is all their wealth and self-assumed strength to counteract or conquer bodily suffering;—

but, Walter," continued Mr. Liddon, "you do not tell us what Greville put forward as reasons for his want of faith in God."

"His want of faith or belief," answered Walter, "is based, it appears, in the absence of what he is pleased to term a foundation for a faith—he scoffs at the Bible, denies the inspiration of its writing, and terms it, in fact, fabulous—he says it is beyond his or any other man's comprehension, contradictory in many of its passages, and irreconcilable with common sense. I wished him to point out anything which could justify these conclusions, but with the usual resort of a man who dreads investigation, or is too indolent or bigoted to enter into explanations, or to listen to reason or argument, he replied that it could lead to no useful result to discuss the matter further, and you know how it subsequently ended."

“It is very sad,” said Mr. Liddon, “that he should have thus wrapped himself up in his own pride and self-conceit, but it certainly does seem to follow that if a man have no foundation upon which to build his faith, and there is none other but the inspired Word of God upon which the true faith can be based, he is like a rudderless ship, cast hither and thither by the caprice of the winds and waves.”

“Truly,” said Mrs. Liddon. “But independently of the Sacred Word, should not that ‘common sense’ of which Greville boasts, teach him that there *must* be some Governing Hand over all;—that the operations of nature, and life, and death, are not and cannot be attributable to *chance*.”

“Just so,” continued Mr. Liddon, “but you see that if there be an absence of faith in

that which the Christian world accepts as its guide, there can be no belief in the Divine Architect of the Universe or in any superintending and directing hand."

"But," interposed Walter, "it does seem so utterly incredible to me that any human being, possessed of reasoning and intellectual faculties, can really believe that all things are attributable to mere chance. Every man believes in the changes of the seasons, in the ebb and flow of the tide, in the germination, growth, and maturity of the productions of the earth, and in the thousand operations of nature which are constantly occurring and recurring before and around him—yet he does not see or know *how* they are brought about; his may be the hand to sow the seed—and with what view and under what conviction does he plant it? Obviously with the intention

of increasing his store, and in the full *faith* that the earth will yield that increase."

"Herein seems to me," continued Mr. Liddon, "to be the stumbling-block of professed atheists—whom folk nowadays are pleased to term 'Freethinkers'—that unless they *see* they will not believe. Your example, Walter, points to this conclusion; the man you depict sees, or *thinks* he sees, the operations of nature, but he does not; he sees their *results*, while he ignores the fact that he has been exhibiting, while the operations necessary to produce the results have been going on, a faith in the 'things not seen.'"

"Thereby illustrating, unwittingly indeed," said Mrs. Liddon, "St. Paul's definition of faith. Oh, how is it possible for men to disbelieve? What comfort is there in the assurance that from the Christian religion

emanates all that is good and pure ! And *without* the faith in a future and an Eternal State of happiness and repose, what would this life be ? What encouragement for the exhibition of the nobler sentiments of humanity ? But what ails you my dear husband ? ” abruptly exclaimed Mrs. Liddon, with painful anxiety.

The exclamation was caused by a death-like pallor which had suddenly overspread Mr. Liddon’s face—he sighed heavily as the momentary spasm passed away, and a little colour flushed his cheek.

“ ’Tis but a passing spasm, dear Mary,” he replied, with his eyes suffused with tears, but beaming with a light of love and affection for her who had with him trodden life’s path in domestic peace and happiness for so many years—

“Nay Walter,” he added, as his son took his hand and felt his pulse, “do not alarm yourself or your mother; I am already myself again, but somewhat weary.”

“I fear we have somewhat tired you, by prolonging our discussion too far,” said Mrs. Liddon.

“Of such a subject, my dear wife, I think none of us could readily weary, and before we close it, let me for one moment recall what Lord Bacon says in his Essays on the subject of faith. After observing that the knowledge of truth and the belief of truth are the sovereign good of nature, and that as God breathed light into the face of matter, so He breathed light, that is truth, into the face of His chosen, he adds, ‘I would rather believe all the fables in the legend, and the Talmud, and the Alcoran, than that this

universal frame is without a mind, and therefore God never wrought miracles to convince atheism, because His ordinary works convince it. It is true that a little philosophy induceth man's mind to atheism, but depth in philosophy bringeth men's minds about to religion. For while the mind of man looketh upon second causes scattered, it may rest in them, and go no farther, but when it beholdeth the chain of them confederate and linked together, it must needs fly to Providence and Deity.' The Freethinkers of the present day, it seems to me," continued Mr. Liddon, "are the 'little philosophers' painted by Lord Bacon, though, to my mind, their little philosophy must be, as it is, *perilous* and misdirected. Thank God we are enabled to rest our faith and hopes on the ample assurances of the Holy Scriptures, and the messages.

of love and promised acceptance by God, by and through Jesus Christ."

Here Mr. Liddon quietly reclined in his easy chair, while the lights were brought in and the dessert removed.

As the twilight rapidly deepened he appeared disposed to sleep, and Walter left the room, and strolled into the garden to ponder over the subject of their late discussion.

The evening was still and tranquil, and all around seemed hushed in repose—broken only by the delicious notes of the nightingale, as it trilled forth its wondrous evensong in the woods skirting the grounds.

Naturally, Walter's thoughts recurred to the sudden, though transitory attack that had seized Mr. Liddon. His practised eye and skill made it too painfully evident to him that his life was in a precarious state; he

knew that the spasm and its accompanying symptoms betokened disease of the heart, and that the silken cord of life might be suddenly and abruptly snapped ; the tears that silently stole down his cheek evinced how deeply the thought grieved his loving heart.

Just as he reached the gate leading to the main road, which was some three hundred yards from the house, he was aroused from his painful reverie by the rattle of a horse's hoofs, which rang out sharp and clear on the quiet evening air ; and while Walter listened and wondered who rode so fast at that hour in that retired neighbourhood, the outline of horse and rider became distinguishable at the bend of the road.

" Can it be," he soliloquised, " that I am professionally required. I hope not in my

father's present condition. I fear it is so; the messenger, whoever he may be, is evidently reining in, with a view of stopping here!"

"Ah, Wilkins," he exclaimed, as he recognised the rider, "I hope no ill wind blows you here this evening."

"I hope not sir," responded Wilkins (who was one of the post-boys at the principal hotel in the neighbouring town, which was distant about three miles), "I have brought you a telegram, despatched by the post-master. Is there any reply, sir?"

Walter for the moment was paralysed, as a boding dread of coming evil possessed his heart. He looked at the address, it was—

"William Liddon, Esq., Oaklands, near Reading."

"For my father," murmured Walter.

“What can it mean? I must consult with my mother,” and then turning to the messenger he said, “I observe the charges for a special messenger on horseback are paid; I will not keep you. Should I deem it necessary, I will send my groom with the reply, if one is required—good-night, Wilkins.”

“Good-night, sir!” replied the man, respectfully touching his hat, and, turning his horse’s head towards the town, he leisurely trotted homewards.

Walter stood still at the gate, conning over the matter in his mind, and turning the envelope over and over, wondering what it all meant.

He could not remember that “Oaklands” had in his father’s time ever before been favoured with a telegram. The “hurly burly” of business transactions, with their

losses and gains, fears, anxieties and hopes, had long since ceased to trouble its inmates.

What, therefore, could it all be about? Who was it from? Was a dear friend attacked with sudden sickness? were questions rapidly put to himself, and which he could not answer while the yellow envelope, which he held in his hand, remained sealed.

“Well,” he at last said aloud, “this idle speculation must end—the message may require an answer—but should my father be made acquainted with this? Yes, that is the first point to be considered.”

And he turned on his heel, closed the gate, and walked rapidly towards the house.

CHAPTER III.

As Walter approached the house, he observed lights burning in his father's bedroom, and his heart beat faster as he quickened his step, to relieve his anxiety at the thought that Mr. Liddon might have suffered during his absence, for, looking at his watch as he entered the house, he found that time had sped its course more rapidly than he had anticipated.

He went noiselessly across the hall into the dining-room, which he found empty. A solemn stillness seemed to pervade the house; his pulses throbbed still faster, and he sat down to try and compose himself.

He had hardly done so, when the butler entered the room.

Walter turned his head, and said to him, "Johnson, where is your master?"

"He has retired, sir," replied Johnson; "I thought I heard a footstep in the hall, and ventured to enter the room rather abruptly, as I was directed to request you to go upstairs immediately you came in."

"But is your master ill, Johnson?" breathlessly enquired Walter, desirous to ascertain what was the impression on the mind of that favourite old domestic.

"I hope not, sir, but he looked pale and tired, and seemed anxious for your return," replied the butler.

"That will do, Johnson, you can leave the room," and with a sorrowful look on his face, Johnson reluctantly complied with his

young master's directions, for he would have questioned him as to his opinion of Mr. Liddon's condition.

Johnson had been in the family more than twenty years, and had learned to love and honour those whom he served—his heart had, by the daily intercourse with the family, been touched by their kindness to and regard for him and all others who surrounded them, and he felt deeply anything that disturbed their happiness.

Walter hesitated only a minute to once more consider how he should deal with the telegram he still kept in his hand, and which sorely troubled him.

"But my father first," he mentally ejaculated, and putting the dreaded missive in his pocket, he left the room, and rapidly mounted the staircase that led to Mr. Liddon's bedroom.

On entering it, he found his mother sitting by the side of the bed, and as she heard the door turn on its hinges, she looked up, and with her eyes joyfully welcomed her son; at the same time she held up her finger to him to enjoin silence. The slight noise, however, caused by Walter's entrance, had awakened Mr. Liddon, who said in a subdued voice—

“Is that you, Walter?”

“Yes, sir,” replied Walter; “I have been wandering in the garden, and fear I gave less heed to the lapse of time than I ought to have done; but,” he continued, taking his father's hand, “I had left you, as I thought, in a gentle sleep, and was unwilling to disturb you.”

Mr. Liddon glanced at his son with his ever pleasant smile, though there was still the weary look on his face, and after a short pause he pressed Walter's hand and said—

“Do not look so distressed, my dear boy; though I know and feel the delicate, if not critical state of my health, I have no pain or suffering, and I hope that with a night’s rest and quiet, I may, with God’s good providence, be refreshed and restored in the morning.”

“And here,” thought Walter, touching his pocket containing the telegram, “Heaven only knows what this distracting missive may contain! but further suspense is intolerable, though it is quite clear my father must not be disturbed by it to-night,” so he simply answered—

“I will give you a soothing draught, and then leave you to rest.”

He then left the room, and having made up the draught, speedily returned and administered it, bade his father good-night, and retired.

On reaching the dining-room he closed the door, and having sat down, he took the unwelcome telegram from his pocket ; he again turned it over several times, read and re-read the address, and though naturally most anxious to know what its contents might be, he still hesitated to break the seal. At last he tore it open almost with trembling hands, and unfolded the enclosure, and read the following :—

“ From J. Gordon,

“ Hyde Park Gardens,

“ London.

“ To William Liddon, Esq.,

“ Oaklands, near Reading.

“ Be prepared to come or send Walter to London to-morrow. I fear a great commercial crisis is at hand—will write fully to-night.”

"A commercial crisis!" said Walter, aloud, "and what have we to do with a commercial crisis?"

He was sitting with his face towards the fireplace, with the telegram and envelope in his hand, as he thus, in an astonished tone and with a raised voice, asked himself the question, and did not observe that Mrs. Lid-don had entered the room.

"What, Walter," she said, as she quietly stole to the back of his chair, and caressingly placed her hand on his shoulder, "you soliloquising aloud? It is not a prudent practice; but what, above all things in the world, has carried your thoughts to a commercial crisis?" and though she was assured it was not so, she added, "I hope you have not involved yourself in commercial or speculative transactions."

“Ah ! dear mother,” replied Walter, returning her smile, “I am quite certain you do not think I have been doing anything of the sort ; I was alluding to the contents of this mysterious telegram. Read it, mother, and construe it for me ; I confess it is beyond my comprehension. Though addressed to my father, I deemed it best to open it, not in the least conjecturing from whom it could come, or what could be its purport ; and now I have read it, I am no more enlightened than I was when it lay in my hand unopened.”

Mrs. Liddon having perused it, said, “Your father, as you know, had originally invested almost every shilling of what he possessed in the English Funds. Subsequently, however, he sold out the whole of the Government Stock, and reinvested the produce of

the sale in one of the largest mercantile houses in London ; I, for the moment, forget the name of the firm, for I have never troubled myself in any way to interfere with your father's business matters. I need hardly say that I have had such implicit confidence in his judgment and discretion, that I felt certain he would not involve himself in anything like a speculative business, or invest his money without abundant assurance of the stability of the people with whom he had placed it—but stay,” she added, looking at the telegram, “let me see—J. Gordon, Hyde Park Gardens—I remember this sale and reinvestment of which I have spoken, was effected some two years ago, during your sojourn in London. It was done by Mr. Gordon's advice ; your father afterwards told me what suggestions Gordon had made, and

that he had pointed out that the house in which he had advised him to reinvest his money was as safe as the Bank of England. He explained that the result of the change would be that we should receive at least double the income we obtained from the Funds, and that the money might be withdrawn without loss of interest at a month's notice, or at call with forfeiture of the current interest. Your father, having your future in view, felt that he ought not to neglect the opportunity thus offered, and as he had the most supreme confidence in Mr. Gordon's astuteness and honour, he gave him the necessary instructions to carry out the sale and transfer of the Funds—the effect of this has since been to increase our income, as it was promised it would do ; and while enabling us to extend our sphere of usefulness and charity,

some few hundreds have, in consequence, been added to the capital.

“All this seems most comprehensive,” observed Walter, “but I fear it makes Mr. Gordon’s message appear very ominous.”

“Why so, dear Walter?”

“Why, my simple mother—do you not see that a commercial crisis may seriously and dangerously affect any mercantile house, and as I never knew, and I had too much respect for my father to enquire, how and under what circumstances the change in the original fund had been made, and where it was subsequently, and now stands invested, I did not at first comprehend the bearing of Mr. Gordon’s telegram with reference to ourselves: Your explanation, however, makes it evident to me how a commercial crisis may affect the stability of my father’s security.”

“But the house in which the investment is made,” answered Mrs. Liddon, “deals with its millions, Mr. Gordon said, and was as unassailable and firm as it was possible.”

“But don’t you see, if a mercantile house deals with its millions, its liabilities are probably proportionately great, and with such enormous transactions running into so many ramifications and channels, a commercial crisis cannot fail to affect it more or less—but we won’t anticipate disaster. Mr. Gordon’s letter to-morrow morning may solve our doubts and dispel our fears. One thing is clear, my father’s mind must not be disturbed by this matter to-night.”

“True, my dear son—thoughtful as ever! but let us pray that whatever *perils* it may be our lot to be involved in, we may strive to battle with them with Christian fortitude

and patience. I *know* I may rely on your courage and support, come what may. That it may please God in His infinite mercy to strengthen my dear husband to bear them if and when they assail us, let us hope. We both know his strength of mind and Christian spirit, but I should greatly fear that any sudden shock might prove very dangerous to him in his present weak state."

"Any sudden shock," replied Walter, "we must endeavour to prevent, but if Mr Gordon's promised letter should require one of us to go to London to-morrow, we shall have to break the matter to him, and as in all probability we shall not be apprised of any *results*, good, bad, or indifferent, it will be preparing his mind for what may follow."

Mother and son having for some time longer talked over the absorbing topic, a tap at the

door interrupted their conversation, and in obedience to Mrs. Liddon's "come in," the housekeeper, Mrs. Evans (who had resided in the family even longer than the butler), entered the room and said that Mr. Liddon had just awoke, and had desired Mrs. Liddon to go up to him.

Before leaving the room, turning to her son, she said—

"Well, Walter, let it be understood that neither the arrival of the telegram nor the subject to which it refers shall be mentioned to Mr. Liddon to-night. I will order the coffee to be brought in, and I think you had better come upstairs and see your father in the course of a few minutes. I will send Evans to tell you when I wish you to do so." And thus having said, she left the room to go to her husband's chamber.

Walter, with all his fortitude, could not calm his agitated spirit—his first and foremost consideration and anxiety were about his father's precarious state of health—as a medical man of no mean experience, he knew that excitement of any kind might prove fatal to Mr. Liddon, and thus Mr. Gordon's telegram was the source of much troublous thought—he walked up and down the room, ruminating over the whole subject with a foreboding of coming *perils* and sorrow, which, fight against his presentiments as he would, oppressed him most painfully. His, however, was not the temperament or disposition to care to cope with shadows; it would be time enough to grapple with realities when they came—his confidence in a Higher Power had ever been his refuge and resort in times of troubles, trials, and temptations, and he knew

and felt that if the foreboding shadows fell and brought with them distress and disaster, the same Arm, whose protection he had ever trusted in, would be assuredly stretched out to support him and those he loved best upon earth—and as his reflections fell into this channel, he devoutly knelt down and offered up to God one brief but eloquent prayer full of love and gratitude for all past mercies and for assistance and guidance in the future. And as he rose from his knees, with moistened eyelids, his heart felt composed and strengthened, and he waited calmly for the summons to his father's bedside.

This was not long coming, and in obedience to it he went thither.

He found Mr. Liddon quite tranquil, and after sitting and conversing with him for some time, he again bade him "good-night,"

having enjoined him to seek perfect repose and rest.

On his return to the dining-room he felt how vacant and dull it looked, how different to its accustomed aspect at this period of the evening. Alone in the deserted room, how he missed the kindly faces and cheerful voices with which it was usually tenanted, but he thought "On every ground I must be strong;" he meant to try to be so, and the uplifted eye showed from what source he sought and believed he should obtain that strength.

On his mother rejoining him at the table, his countenance, if not absolutely cheerful, was at least reassuring to her, and she said—

"Dear Walter, I would fain gather encouragement and hope from the expression of your face—tell me, now, what you really

think of your father's condition. I would know the worst and strive to prepare myself for it."

"Mother," replied Walter, with a voice broken with emotion, "it would be both idle and wicked on my part to deceive you. My father is no doubt in a critical state, but it is just one of those cases in which life may be granted to the sufferer for many years, if he be free from undue excitement; tranquility of mind and quietude are, however, eminently required, as any unexpected impetus given to the pulsation of the heart by sudden joy, grief, or otherwise, might produce serious, if not fatal, results."

"God's will be done," said Mrs. Liddon, and her choking sobs prevented further utterance. She, like Walter, had looked at the vacant chair, and thought of the familiar

form which had so long occupied it. As it were, at a glance, her mind reverted to the early days of her marriage with her beloved husband, and traced with inconceivable rapidity, almost step by step, the happy years she had passed with him, who was ever kind, gentle, and affectionate, and her anguish seemed insupportable.

Walter knew that it was far better to let his mother's grief have its full sway, and though his heart was wrung with exquisite sadness to witness this great sorrow, he remained silent.

Mrs. Liddon, having somewhat exhausted her feelings, looked up at him with swollen eyes, and said—

“ This perhaps is wrong of me to thus give way, but the anticipation of coming affliction is very painful, though it may

betray a want of confidence in, and reliance upon, the Almighty, which should not be. You, my dear Walter, have all the world before you, and will naturally, in the course of time, probably form new ties and associations, which will be the means of blunting and softening your grief, when our loved one is removed from us ; but with me—if I lose him, my future life must be a blank ; and though I may, and by God's grace will, strive to conquer such an undue exhibition of my sorrow as may tend to interfere with the fulfilment of my duties to my God, my neighbour, and yourself, the void in my heart can never in this life be filled ; but I pain you by these reflections and, I hope, needlessly distress myself, if indeed I am not almost stultifying my prayer, ' God's will be done.' ”

A long pause ensued—the silence became so oppressive to Walter, that he could no longer resist the impulse that seized him, and he softly approached his mother, who was leaning her head on her hand, with her face covered with her handkerchief—dropping on one knee by her side, he took her disengaged hand in his, and said—

“Dearest mother, I would not intrude on your grief, but do not abandon hope when there is much reason for it; and do not let anticipations of afflictions, which God grant may never be realized, thus affect you—Look at me mother,” he continued, “and remember that come what may, you will have one strong arm and loving heart that shall never fail you; come grief, come trouble, he who owes so much to you will ever cling to you with the tenderest and most grateful

affection, and though all this could not fill the void in your heart, which the loss of my dear father [would inevitably cause you, yet may it prove a source of some comfort and solace to you," and here Walter kissed his mother's hand with a devotion which deeply moved her.

She looked down at him with a mother's warmest love, and, raising him to her arms, embraced him with overflowing gratitude to Him who had given her so good a son.

And now, both having become somewhat more tranquil, Mrs. Liddon said—

"I will just steal upstairs and see your father, and tell Evans, who is sitting with him, what to do, and will then return to you, and discuss to-morrow's programme, so far as we can advantageously do so in anticipation of Mr. Gordon's letter."

Mrs. Liddon was not long absent, and on her return to Walter, she was grateful to be able to tell, and he rejoiced to hear, that Mr. Liddon was sleeping very quietly, and that Mrs. Evans had reported "that his sleep had been undisturbed since Mrs. Liddon had previously left him."

"I don't know, then," said Walter, "that to-morrow's proposed proceedings need much, if any, discussion to-night; they must, of course, be governed by what Mr. Gordon's letter may tell us. If it be desirable that I should go to London, I will do so; let us hope that my father will pass a tranquil night, so that refreshed and reinvigorated by sleep, we may be able, without fear of ill-consequences, to submit all this to the judgment of his greater experience and practical knowledge."

"Be it so then, Walter:—I will retire at

once, and relieve Evans, and go you to bed soon, and may to-morrow's sun gladden our hearts with renewed hope that peaceful and happy days may still be in store for all of us in this life. So that your dear father be spared us yet a little while, we can together bear our lot with fortitude, unaffected by the frowns of misfortune or worldly trouble—God bless you, Walter !”

“God bless you, dear mother !” replied Walter, “do not hesitate to call me instantly should a marked change of any kind occur to my father, but I trust and think such will not take place, and that you may make your mind easy on that point.”

Mrs. Liddon and Walter having again mutually prayed for God's blessing on each other, and for the restoration to them of him they loved so well, parted for the night.

Was it to be the last night of tranquility for them, or were the *perils* already conceived in the womb of the future, and surging onward on the great wave of affliction, to darken their future lives?

If the wave do break upon them, assuredly their faith and confidence "in the Protector of all that trust in Him," will sustain them.

CHAPTER IV.

THE sun had risen some time on the morning of the eighth day of May, one thousand eight hundred and sixty-six, when Walter Liddon awoke from a refreshing sleep. The windows of his bedroom had an eastern aspect, and the early sunshine fell full upon them, while bright streaks of light found their way over the carpet, and on to the walls of the room, wherever they could creep in between the venetian blinds.

To Walter's memory, the events of the previous day rapidly presented themselves, and without hesitating to ponder over them,

he at once partly dressed himself and hastened to Mr. Liddon's room; he listened at the door, and as all within seemed wrapped in repose, he thought it would be injudicious to disturb the inmates, for he was sure that if his presence had been required, his mother would have called him; he therefore returned to his own room and completed dressing, and then, having offered his grateful thanksgiving to God for the mercies of the past night, and earnestly implored His guidance and protection in the coming day, he went downstairs, and having thrown open the front windows in the dining-room, stepped out on the lawn, and turning into the shrubbery to the left of the house, he passed through it to the stables. Here he found the groom and stable boy engaged in their morning avocations.

“Thomas,” he said to the former, “put the saddle on my mare, ride into Reading, get the letter bag, and return as quickly as you can, as I am anxious to have the letters before the usual time of delivery.”

“I suppose, sir,” replied the groom, “I must call upon Crouch, and tell him I have fetched the bag ? ”

“Yes, Thomas, of course, as it will save him the trouble of going to the office, and he might perhaps otherwise think I had precipitately ousted him from his employment, so tell him the reason why I have sent thus early this morning, and that he is to continue to bring the bag as usual to-morrow.

Whilst Thomas was receiving his orders he had saddled Walter’s mare, and as his young master concluded his directions, he mounted and rode off to fulfil them.

Walter returned to the house, anxious to ascertain how his father had passed the night.

On re-entering it, Mrs. Evans met him as he was crossing the hall; one look at her cheerful face elated him, and he said in a cheery voice—

“ I need not ask how your master is this morning, Evans; your countenance tells me what you have to report.”

“ Oh, yes, Mr. Walter, I am sure you know that master has passed a good night,” replied Evans, “ and he seems quite himself again this morning.”

“ Thank God ! ” reverently said Walter.

“ Is my mother likely to be soon down ? ” he enquired.

“ Yes, sir,” answered Evans, “ she told me to say that she was anxious herself to tell you the good news.”

His mind thus far much relieved, Walter again strolled into the garden.

The sun was still shining brightly, and there was hardly a breath of air sufficient to cause a shimmer of the tiniest leaf or spray, and still all in nature was calm as on yesterday evening. The feathered songsters had long resumed their cheerful carols, and the male birds were singing to their mates, who patiently and fondly spread their wings over their newly-hatched progeny, after their morning meal, which nature had endowed the male birds' instinct to provide.

As Walter stood for some time silently gazing over the landscape, and his ear involuntarily listened to the harmony around him, his mind reverted to the expected communication from Mr. Gordon. He had been gladdened and reassured by the cheering re-

port of his father's condition, but an unconquerable sadness dashed the returning ray of sunshine in his heart as he dreaded to receive, yet anxiously looked for, the return of the groom with the letter bag.

How often does this strange contradiction in our fears and hopes occur to most of us in life!

We look for the happening of a coming event with doubt and anxiety, though we are longing to know the results that will attend its occurrence, and if something occur to postpone the fulfilment of that which may prove acceptable and pleasant to us; yet if there be the alternative in what we apprehend and look forward to, of trouble or pain, we almost rejoice to know, that at least, perhaps, another twenty-four hours delay has been interposed before the looked-for intelligence can be com-

municated to us, and our doubts and fears solved.

Walter's eye lighted with pleasure as it caught the figure of his mother crossing the lawn and approaching him. He walked to meet her, and after their usual affectionate morning greeting, Mrs. Liddon said—

“Walter, how this beautiful morning accords with my own feelings. Evans tells me that she has informed you what a good night your father has had and how much restored to himself he appears to be. Nature itself seems to add gladness to my heart, and the gloom and shadows of last night have passed away. I am quite sure you feel with me that if your dear father's improvement continue—and God grant that it may—we can well bear any earthly losses that may assail us—but who is this on horseback?” she

asked, as Thomas, the groom, unfastened the gate and rode up the avenue at a hard canter.

"It is Thomas," replied Walter, "whom I sent into Reading to fetch the letter bag, instead of waiting for Crouch to bring it out as usual. I could not restrain my anxiety to know what Mr. Gordon has to communicate, besides it is important that I should catch an early train, if possible, if I have to go to London."

The groom now handed Walter the letter bag, and, touching his hat respectfully, retired.

"Now," said Walter, unlocking the bag and taking out the letters, "let us hope the news may be better than we anticipate."

There were but three letters, as there was little correspondence with the inmates of

“Oaklands” of a business character. Walter looked at the postmarks—one letter bore that of “London”—this he opened, turned over, and found it was from Mr. Gordon.

“I may as well read it to you *in extenso*, dear mother,” and with a somewhat quivering voice, Walter read the open letter.

It was as follows :—

“Hyde Park Gardens, London,

“7th May, 1866.

“DEAR LIDDON,—

“I have been absent from town nearly a month, and returned home only yesterday.

“To-day I went into the City, and on 'Change was surprised to hear whispers, though they have as yet taken no definite form, of coming disaster to commercial interests.

It was said that on the 3rd inst. a very grave point of law had been raised on appeal to the full Court of Common Pleas, at Westminster, which involved incalculable consequences to bankers and investors of capital.

“The case had been adjourned when but partly argued, to-day, and I have just heard has been again adjourned until to-morrow.

“On scanning the law reports of the 3rd inst., I found that the question at issue was one as to the power of railway companies to give and negotiate bills of exchange under their corporate seal.

“It would seem that a railway company had issued nearly a quarter-of-a-million of so-called securities of this nature—that a verdict had been given against them in the Court below for the full amount which they represented—that the company, however, had ob-

tained leave to move the Court above, on the ground of the invalidity of the bills, because they were securities, or, ostensible securities, which it was beyond the powers of a railway company to issue, and that the case had thus come before the full Court pursuant to the leave accorded to the company.

“That there are many more of similar bills in circulation I have little doubt, and if a decision of the Court should be adverse to the holders of the bills, it cannot but fail to create extraordinary results, if not an absolute panic. As in one out of the three cases before the Court, the house in whose stability you are so deeply involved are the plaintiffs, you may imagine with what interest I read and considered the proceedings, and on my return home the conclusion of my cogitations was, that I should immediately summon you to

town, so that we might together debate over the step that should be taken, if any, to protect and secure our interests—thus the reason of my telegraphic message of yesterday.

“Though I have not, and cannot have any real doubt as to the house in question holding its own, still, probably, as it was in some measure at my instigation you invested your money in it, I feel gravely anxious about the matter, and, as I have said, should like to discuss it with you personally.

“I would have run down to ‘Oaklands’ but thought it far better that you should be here, on the spot, so that if necessary we might take immediate action.

“Don’t feel much disturbed by what I have said—I am as deeply involved in the matter as yourself (though this may be of no consolation to you). I have determined, how-

ever, at least to await the conclusion of tomorrow's proceedings before taking any action.

"Come to town as early as possible, and we may be able to get to the Court in time to hear judgment delivered.

"Believe me to be,

"Yours faithfully,

"J. GORDON.

"W. Liddon, Esq.

"Oaklands."

As Walter concluded the reading of the letter, Mrs. Liddon fixed her eyes on her son with an enquiring glance.

"Well, mother," he said, "you would ask me what I think of that which I have just read?"

"Yes, Walter," replied Mrs. Liddon, "tell me."

“In the first place, then,” answered Walter, “it is quite evident that Mr. Gordon has acted towards my father in perfect good faith, seeing that he himself has so large a stake in the matter, and it is equally clear that his confidence in the house in question has not been seriously shaken. Again, if the decision of the Court should prove to be an adverse one to it, surely the loss of an action could not gravely affect the position or stability of a firm of such long standing, of such well-known integrity, and whose transactions are so stupendous—its resources must be almost infinite, and in the event of disaster to the business itself, the immense wealth of the partners will, I should say, certainly secure the depositors. So much for the comfortable or comforting side of the matter. On the other hand, as I said yesterday, with refer-

ence to its enormous transactions, it must inevitably be so that large dealings and speculations are necessarily accompanied by commensurate liabilities and responsibilities—still, on the whole, I am inclined to view the position of things hopefully, if not favourably.”

“I am rejoiced that such is your opinion,” said Mrs. Liddon, “but unquestionably you had better go to London by the earliest train. Will you go to the stables and tell Thomas to have the carriage ready to take you to the station to catch the earliest available train? I will go to your father, sketch to him briefly what has occurred, and prepare him to see you.”

“Very good,” replied Walter, “but, mother,” he added, stopping her as she was about to enter the house, “I think you may

as well at once give my father Gordon's letter, that he may read and consider it meanwhile ; it will save needless preparatory explanation, and he will the more readily instruct me when I rejoin you."

So Mrs. Liddon took the letter, and went to her husband's room.

There Walter soon joined his parents. On his entering the room, Mr. Liddon held out his hand, and greeted him with a cheerful "Good-morning."

Walter anxiously scanned his father's face, and was greatly gratified to see that it bore no trace of his sudden but temporary attack of the previous evening, and that his countenance and manner were restored to their usual appearance and tone.

"Well," said he, addressing Walter, "what's all this fuss Gordon is making? I

cannot really think that matters are so serious as he appears to consider them ; Gordon himself might have withdrawn his deposit at call, and sold his shares yesterday, if he had wished, and his not having done so is the very best proof, to my mind, that he is not very greatly alarmed or dubious as to ultimate results. His letter is a straightforward one, and I am satisfied he is a man of such scrupulous honour and caution, that he would never have suggested to me to invest as I have done, had he not felt as assured, as it was possible for him to be, that I ran no risk in adopting his advice ; his *bona fides* was and is best evidenced by his having been previously, and still remaining in the same boat ; however, I agree it is best you should go to town, to see him, to-day. Don't be afraid to leave me, my dear boy," added

Mr. Liddon, as he saw Walter looking at him nervously, "you see I am, by God's blessing, quite myself again. Go, therefore, at once, and on your arrival in London, make your way direct to Gordon's—doubtless he will wait at home expecting to see me—and explain to him why I have sent you to represent me; you will then hear from him more fully all the circumstances, and from these you will be able to form your own conclusions as to the course that should be pursued to guard against or mitigate any threatened disaster. You may, I am satisfied, place much confidence in, and reliance on, Gordon's opinion and discretion. It would be as well, I think, if you were to come home to-night, happen what may, as, if necessary, you can return to London to-morrow by the early morning train, and be

at Paddington before business people are astir."

"Then, sir," said Walter, "I will be off at once; and, having fulfilled your instructions, be with you again in the evening; and let us hope I may be able to bring you such news as will dispel Mr. Gordon's somewhat gloomy apprehensions—so good-bye," added Walter, as he left the room.

Hastening downstairs, he speedily disposed of his breakfast, and jumping into the carriage, which had been standing at the door some minutes, he was soon making his way to Reading station as rapidly as two fast-trotting horses could take him.

On his arrival there, he found he had a few minutes to spare, and having directed the coachman at what hour to meet him in the

evening, he took his ticket, and walked on to the platform.

It was still early, and the London morning papers had not yet reached the station, so Walter was unable to obtain the news of the preceding day, and, with a return of depression of spirits he could not control, he paced up and down the platform.

“What,” he thought, “if this great house in which his father’s *all* was invested should collapse, and the result prove to him the total loss of his fortune? Would his health and strength enable him to bear up against it—*or—*”

Oh! it was that “or”—the alternative of his being stricken down. “And then,” he painfully, but unconsciously said aloud, “My dear mother!”

He had been so entirely absorbed by his

meditations, as he uttered the last three words with a bitterness of spirit which told of the mental suffering the picture he had drawn caused him, that he did not, at the moment, observe the benevolent and sympathizing look that was cast upon him by an elderly gentleman clad in the garb of a clergyman, who was standing close to him at the time, and who had evidently heard his last exclamation, as the words were wrung irrepressibly from his heart.

He suddenly looked up, and caught the kindly expression on the gentleman's face, and his heart went out to him in gratitude for his sympathy, for he felt assured he had it.

With that gentlemanly courtesy which Walter ever evinced to all, but especially to his elders, he forced a genial smile into his

expressive features, and, as he took off his hat, bade the gentleman "good-morning."

"Good-morning," the latter replied, and he joined Walter in his renewed walk on the platform.

They had barely taken one turn before the station bell rang, as the approaching train appeared in sight; and as Walter's newly-acquired companion was, like himself, bound for London, they together entered the same carriage, which had no other occupants but themselves.

It was quite evident that Walter's companion had taken an interest in, and wished to improve his acquaintance with him—in fact he told Walter as much, at the same time handing him his card—a courtesy which Walter returned.

Walter looked at the card in his hand, and read, "Rev. W. Domville."

Mr. Domville at the same time scanned Walter's, and said, looking at him enquiringly—

"Mr. Liddon, of Oaklands?"

"I am Mr. Liddon's son," replied Walter.

"Yes! that I presumed," said Mr. Domville, "but you reside with your father at Oaklands."

"Yes," Walter answered.

"Then," said Mr. Domville, "I am afraid I shall meet with your reprehension for not having fulfilled a promise I made to a parishioner of mine before I left the north to visit this district, where I have been staying with an old friend who has been for some years located at Caversham."

"Indeed," observed Walter, "may I ask

who has been good enough to bestow a passing thought on me ? ”

“ An old schoolfellow of yours, if I mistake not,” replied Mr. Domville, “ and though the principles which he should have acquired in the field in which his earliest years were passed, and at the fine old school at which he was educated, would have led one to hope, and believe, that he would have formed one of my *congregation*, I much lament that he does not.”

“ An old Harrow man, and not a Churchman ! ” remarked Walter, meditatively.

“ Even so, and not only not a Churchman, but, I greatly fear, not a *Christian*,” said Mr. Domville.

“ I cannot be mistaken then, when I mention the name of Edward Greville, as the man to whom you refer.”

“ You are right,” replied Mr. Domville, “ and it is indeed very sad to see a man of his talent and wealth, combining as they do in their possessor a generous and charitable nature, so utterly averse to recognise our religion as the real basis of all real happiness in this life, and of the hope of a future hereafter, which we believe will dim any lustre that may belong to the greatest enjoyments the world can afford.”

“ I entirely echo your sentiments, sir,” said Walter.

“ I would that Greville’s heart could be touched by the sense of his responsibilities, and that he might realise how much he will have to account for, not only for the use or abuse of the great wealth which has been given him, but also for the great evils which the force of his example may

scatter broadcast amongst those with whom he is associated."

"But, Mr. Domville," added Walter, "you have not yet told me in what manner, and for what reason, you have laid yourself open to *my* reprehension."

"Well, then," replied Mr. Domville, "because I promised Greville to call upon you before I left Berkshire, and convey all sorts of kindly expressions of regard to you, from him, and at the same time urge you to name an early date when you would journey northward to visit him; and further he commissioned me to explain that he has been so occupied, he had nearly forgotten that he owed you a letter, which he remarked he ought to have written you some time since, so I was to endeavour to make his peace with you, and tell you to come and see

him. I rejoice that this opportunity to do so, and to ask you to forgive me also for leaving the neighbourhood without having accomplished his mission, has been afforded me."

"Even your kindly intercession was hardly needed to keep alive the strong feelings of regard I have for Greville, for though I have wondered at, and felt his neglect, I think he is not the man to forget an old schoolfellow who was so closely associated with him in our earlier days, and one who he knows takes so great an interest in all that concerns him as I do."

"Then what shall I say to him on my return?" enquired Mr. Domville.

"Kindly tell him how gratified I should be to hear from him, and that I shall be specially glad to know how his new buildings are progressing," said Walter.

“ I will undertake,” replied Mr. Domville, “ to be more faithful to you in delivering your message to Greville, than I was likely to have proved to him, but for our accidental and opportune meeting, in conveying his to you ; but what am I to tell him as to your coming amongst us for a few days. I am quite sure he would be delighted to welcome you, and believe me, I should be much pleased to improve our acquaintance, which seems for the present about to be terminated.”

“ To be candid with you, Mr. Domville,” said Walter, “ I am just now somewhat distressed and alarmed by fears of coming *perils* and disasters, and, above all, by anxiety about my father’s state of health ; but I still hope that my gloomy apprehensions may prove unfounded, and that all may speedily assume a brighter aspect.”

"I most sincerely wish your hope may be well grounded, and that when we meet next, which I trust may be soon, your fears may have been dispelled, and your heart lightened from its present oppression. A young spirit like yours should not give way, and from what I have seen of you, I think I rightly conjecture, that if it please God to visit you with losses and sorrow, your confidence and reliance in Him will hold you up, and that your assurance of His power and love will strengthen you in the hour of trial, and make you feel that the Hand that afflicts you, chastens you only to draw you nearer to Him."

Here the conversation was broken off, as the train slackened its speed on its close approach to Paddington Terminus.

Walter had time, however, to thank his

fellow-traveller for his sympathy, and Mr. Domville having warmly shaken him by the hand, and repeated his invitation to visit him in the north, they parted with mutual good wishes for each other's welfare, Mr. Domville to continue his journey to the north, and Walter Liddon to make his way to Hyde Park Gardens, to ascertain what were the special *perils* which threatened to destroy his father's fortune, and disturb the domestic tranquility of his hearth and home.

CHAPTER V.

ON parting with Mr. Domville, Walter hailed a hansom cab, and having jumped into it, he desired the cabman to drive him as quickly as possible to Mr. Gordon's residence.

As they cleared the terminus, and were rattling over the adjoining streets, Walter's thoughts took this form :—

“ Singular this meeting with Mr. Domville—the rector of Greville's parish—he appears to be a very earnest man and full of kindly sympathies—Greville, he says, is his *parish-ioner*, though not a member of his congregation, and, *above all*, not a *Christian*—and

yet Greville feels and cares for those around him, and unconsciously practises the greatest of all Christian virtues, 'Charity.' Will this ever enable him to realise that charity not only 'beareth and endureth' but also '*believeth*' all things. Well, it is a mystery!" and Walter thus concluded his brief soliloquy on the subject as the imminence of the matter more immediately affecting himself and his family forced itself upon him.

He soon arrived at Mr. Gordon's house, and having been ushered into the library, he was speedily joined by that gentleman, with whom he had not been previously personally acquainted.

"My good friend, Mr. Liddon's son?" said Mr. Gordon, interrogatively, as he entered the room and warmly shook Walter by the hand. "I sincerely trust," he added, "that

your father is not prevented being here himself in consequence of illness."

"I fear his health is very delicate, Mr. Gordon," replied Walter, "and last evening he had a spasmodic attack of the heart, to which at times he is subject, but usually speaking only when agitated or surprised by some unexpected occurrence."

"Then I am afraid," rejoined Mr. Gordon, "that my telegram startled him."

"No," answered Walter, "there was apparently no moving cause; on the contrary, everything around us had been tranquil—our lives at 'Oaklands' are usually very uneventful ones, and at the time he was attacked our conversation had been of a particularly quiet character, and there was no inducement to excitement of any kind."

"But you must afterwards have told him

of my anxious wish to see him here, and of the cause that dictated that wish," said Mr. Gordon.

"Certainly," Walter replied, "and of course your letter was this morning handed to him for his perusal—he had apparently quite recovered himself and entered upon the subject with perfect calmness—thus, therefore, happen what may, his mind will at least, in some measure, be prepared to meet the occurrence and to face the result; and *that* result I hope will not prove a disastrous one," he added, looking enquiringly at Mr. Gordon.

"Ultimately disastrous I do not think it possibly can be, though I must be candid enough to tell you that wise and far-seeing men on 'Change mysteriously shake their heads, and without pointing directly to the source from whence they expect them to ori-

ginate, they hint at coming troubles in the commercial world; and there is evidently abroad in the city a restlessness which they who feel and express it, will not explicitly give their reasons for."

"The old adage, Mr. Gordon, that 'coming events cast their shadows before,' may be true; but I apprehend," said Walter, "there must be, in every case where and when they so fall, an exciting element which must cause the shadows; however, you will, I am sure, forgive me if I suggest that we at once endeavour to grapple with our own matters. Will you tell me, then, what step you first propose to take?"

"Well, I propose, in the first place," replied Mr. Gordon, "to go to the Court of Common Pleas to hear the judgment in the great case to which I referred in my letter to Mr.

Liddon, for if that judgment should prove favourable to the plaintiffs, and the Court should hold that the bills of exchange given by the defendants (the railway company) are good and valid, it will, I think, go far to dispel the existing uneasiness and apprehension. We'll be off at once, as the judges set us an example of punctuality, and the court will certainly be crowded."

So saying, Mr. Gordon rang the bell, and directed the servant who answered it, to call a cab round to the door immediately; and as the cabman who had driven Walter to Mr. Gordon's from Paddington had not proceeded a hundred yards from the house, and was letting his horse walk lazily on his return to his stand, while "cabby" was congratulating himself upon having met in his "first fare" of the morning one of the "right

sort who was not particular about a sixpence or two," Mr. Gordon's order was speedily executed, much to the satisfaction of "cabby," who, in response to the servant's call, returned with alacrity.

"To Westminster Hall," said Mr. Gordon, as he and Walter entered the cab.

Oh, fatal mistake, Mr. Gordon ! why, why not to the city armed with power at least to withdraw your friend's deposit, if not to dispose of his shares ?

The inscrutable wisdom and love which forbid man to glance into the pages of the future cannot be questioned, for what would life be if he were permitted to pierce the veil that covers the hidden things of the coming days and years ! there they lie, mercifully hidden in the womb of the future, to be developed at the will of the Creator, until the last page

of the book is turned over and the little span of life shall be ended.

But it may be asked is man's destiny defined and pre-arranged ?

How many have stumbled at the attempt to solve this problem !

Surely man is a free agent, and possesses the will and power to think and do as reason and uprightness, or passion and an evil heart, may prompt him !

Yes, undoubtedly—we are by God's permission framers of our own actions, and allowed to exercise our freedom by serving or rejecting Him for better or for worse in this world and in that which is to come.

But then, if man is a predestined creature, what is the value of his freedom ?

It may appear anomalous, yet it is a solemn mystery (which, however we may

dwelt upon it, we cannot penetrate) that "in the knowledge of God standeth our eternal life," and that "He searcheth out all our thoughts even before they are conceived."

Could Gordon have foreseen the "coming events" of the morrow, the few remaining precious hours of the day would not have been occupied as he was intending to engross them.

And, yet, again, who shall say that had the power of pre-vision been accorded to him, and he had acted otherwise, whether in the end it would have proved more for his own good and that of his friend?

Who, in his retrospect of life, if he well consider the matter, will deny that much in the past, which at the time he had thought would in their results have proved disadvantageous and unfortunate, had ultimately

turned out to be quite the reverse; and if there still be much more in that retrospective glance which he looks upon with dissatisfaction, and that his mind yet reverts to as having been disastrous to him and his fortunes, he may, on mature reflection, perhaps be brought to an opposite conclusion, and recognise in what he has at first stigmatised as disappointing as it has been delusive, a Superintending Hand, which has in mercy withheld the consummation of his wishes; and the lapse of a few years, or months, or days, may convince him that the Infinite wisdom which directed the course of events into a channel which he little contemplated, has really benefited him; and though his early hopes and aspirations had been frustrated to his temporary suffering and distress, yet their defeat had brought him that

greatest of all earthly blessings, peace at the last.

But let us return to Mr. Gordon and Walter Liddon, who had arrived in Palace Yard, Westminster.

On alighting from their cab, they entered the Great Hall, and as they were making their way to the Court of Common Pleas, which was then sitting hearing appeals, Mr. Gordon's attention was attracted by a tap on the shoulder, and a genial voice greeting him with—

“ Why, Gordon, what brings you hither ? ”

“ Oh ! Barclay, how are you,” replied Mr. Gordon, turning to look at the speaker's pleasant face, “ most fortunate we have met you, let me introduce you to the son of our old friend Liddon, of Oaklands, who has accompanied me to this busy scene of legal

strife to hear *the conclusion* of this great case of appeal, in which the —— Railway Company are the defendants.”

Mr. Barclay having shaken hands with Walter, and kindly inquired after his father, said—

“I hope you are not interested in its result, save so far as simple curiosity creates an interest to know how quite a novel point of law raised by the defendants will be decided.”

“I trust,” answered Mr. Gordon, “whatever the judgment of the Court may be, it will *not* affect either my friend Liddon or myself; but you seem to indicate from your manner that you have an impression on your mind if the judgment be unfavourable to the plaintiffs serious results will follow in some shape or form.”

“It cannot be otherwise than that the effect which such a decision would cause in the monetary world generally, would be almost incalculably disastrous,” rejoined Mr. Barclay.

“And in which case I fear I shall want your counsel and advice,” said Mr. Gordon; “explanations I will leave till then, should it be necessary to enter upon them; but are you going into Court? if so, will you be our guide? for I am quite out of my element here.”

“I have an appeal set down for argument next in rotation to that now on; the Court is crowded, and we shall not be able to get in at either of the public entrances; so just come with me to the Judges’ private entrance, and I will take you through it; my common law and articulated clerks are sitting in the

‘ Well ’—one of them shall vacate his place for yourself and your friend, and you must both manage to pack yourselves into his seat.”

So saying, Mr. Barclay led the way out through the same doorway of the Great Hall by which they had entered, and then turning short to the left hand, accompanied by Mr. Gordon and Walter, passed out of Palace Yard, nearly opposite to the eastern end of St. Margaret’s Church, and then, again turning to the left, they reached the Judges’ private entrance to the Courts of Law.

On entering this door they found themselves in a moderate-sized and nearly square chamber, the floor of which was covered with matting, but possessing no other furniture of any kind. At the side of this room, exactly opposite to where they had entered,

were two steps, leading through an archway in the wall to narrow passages running right and left, which were somewhat dark and gloomy, and also covered with matting, similar to that in the room from which they were approached.

Following Mr. Barclay, Mr. Gordon and Walter mounted the steps, and then again turning to the left, soon found themselves in a perfect labyrinth of passages, all so nearly similar in appearance, that Walter was somewhat surprised at the facility with which Mr. Barclay threaded his way through them.

In some of these passages, which were scantily lighted, were many barristers and lawyers' clerks, some with large bundles of legal papers, and others with red or blue bags.

Here and there might be seen amongst

them a sedate and elderly man, but most of them were young men, laughing and chatting right merrily, little heeding or caring for the gravity of the cases in which their masters were engaged, or the great and serious interests at stake between the various litigant parties whom they respectively represented.

Here and there, too, might be seen an anxious plaintiff or defendant, apparently bewildered in his search for his attorney, with whom he had desired to attend consultation with counsel, while the younger clerks were taking stock of him, some quizzically, and others wondering whether he had anything to do with the case in which their masters were retained.

Mr. Barclay and his friends after passing through several tortuous passages, and having

descended two or three steps, arrived at another door, across which was drawn a somewhat faded and dirty crimson curtain.

“Here we are,” said the former, “I will just beckon my clerk, as I can only let one leave, and, as I said before, you must manage to squeeze into his vacated seat. He is a man of goodly proportions,” added Mr. Barclay, jocosely, “and I think you will find it no difficult task to accomplish.”

Having drawn aside the curtain, and wedged himself into the entrance of the “Well,” Mr. Barclay beckoned to his clerk he had referred to, to come to him, and they were at once joined by that gentleman.

“Bevan,” said Mr. Barclay, “take these two gentlemen into Court; they may represent for the occasion two of ourselves, but stay Gordon, mind and keep your heads

bowed, so as not to intervene between the Counsel now addressing the Court, and the Judges, or your personation will be discovered; and Bevan, you can go to Chambers, and return here when the Court has resumed its sittings after lunch."

Mr. Barclay then shook hands with Mr. Gordon and Walter, at the same time telling them that if they wished to see him again in the course of the day, they would find him at his chambers in Lincoln's-Inn till five o'clock, unless in the interval he should be summoned to Westminster; "follow my clerk," he added, as the former disappeared behind the curtain.

That part of the Court which is known in the profession as the "Well," is immediately in front of, though some seven or eight feet below the Bench on which are placed the

seats of the Judges; it is properly appropriated for Attorneys of the Court and their clerks, for whom is provided a table running nearly the whole length between the Bench and that part of the Court which is occupied by Queen's Counsel and Serjeants-at-Law, who thus have the opportunity of referring to those who have instructed them for papers or documents, or any information on matters, or circumstances not quite explicit in their briefs.

Attornies being thus placed too, not only have this advantage of communicating with Counsel, but are located in one of the best positions in the Court for hearing all arguments addressed by Counsel to the Judges, and the latter's judgments and decisions.

Mr. Bevan having conducted Mr. Gordon and Walter to seats at this table, picked up his hat from the floor and left the Court.

On the Bench were seated four of the Judges, the Lord Chief Justice occupying the centre desk, with two puisne Judges on his right hand, and the third on his left hand.

The Chief Justice of this Court was one whom all members of the profession who practised in the Common Law Courts will remember with pleasure—his genial but dignified manner, his dispassionate eloquence, his deep erudition, and his invariable courtesy to all whose duties brought them before him, rendered the fulfilment of those duties pleasant and agreeable; and his unvarying patience with, and encouragement of the younger members of the profession, was a trait specially remarkable in his judicial character.

Next to him, on the right, sat the Judge next in seniority—one whose authority and

judgment in cases similar to that then under consideration was classed as one of, if not *the* highest in England.

The remaining two Judges, like every member of the Judicial Bench, were men of vast experience and learning, and whose honour and integrity might well bear comparison with the members of any Court of Judicature in the world.

Immediately behind the Queen's Counsel, who were numerously represented, were seats for the junior members of the Bar, who had not yet attained the honour of wearing the silk gown, or being "called," as it is termed, *within* the Bar.

The Counsel for the plaintiffs comprised amongst their number two who were afterwards to occupy seats on the Bench before which they were then pleading—one of them

to the Chief Justiceship on the retirement of the then respected Lord Chief Justice—but both of them, alas, have been cut off at the very culmination of their intellectual vigour.

The Counsel representing the defendants were but two—the leader, however, was a host in himself—probably he was one of the handsomest of men, as he was unquestionably one possessing as commanding a presence as any member of the English Bar.

Alas! alas! again—afterwards promoted to the position of the first legal officer of the Crown, his conscientious and scrupulous discharge of his duties, and the immense and never-ceasing work which it entailed upon him, have compelled his retirement from that honourable and distinguished office, and, much to the regret of all who knew him in the Lower House of the Legislature, also deprived

in the very prime of life of one of God's greatest gifts.

May he be able to bear his severe affliction with fortitude, and though the outward world and its objects must be ever darkness to him, may he be surrounded by those who may help to lighten his hours, and strew his future path in life with some compensating pleasures in his enforced retirement from public life.

The junior was a young and rising barrister, too, who, in the temporary absence of his leader (who had been previously heard on behalf of his clients) was, upon the closing of the arguments for the plaintiffs, called upon by the Court to reply on behalf of the defendants.

He had just commenced speaking from the back benches as Mr. Gordon and Walter entered the Court.

His first few sentences were uttered a little nervously, but as he proceeded his manner became calm, and his voice, clear and distinct, was heard in every part of the Court.

It was a case which, of course, neither called for nor permitted any passionate declamation or fervid eloquence, but the speaker's argument was pithy and to the purpose, and it was evident produced much impression on the Court.

He briefly dealt with the Cases quoted by the plaintiffs' Counsel in support of their views, and forcibly pointed out the distinction between them and the issues raised by his clients in that then before the Court; and when he sat down many an old lawyer had marked him in his mind as worthy of his recognition in Chambers and in Court.

To Mr. Gordon and Walter, all that had

occurred was somewhat hazy and indistinct, though to those who were interested in the conduct both of the plaintiffs' and defendants' case, not only from the arguments of Counsel, but from the observations, which, during its progress, had fallen from the Judges, that their judgment would be favourable to the defendants.

As the Lord Chief Justice, in his clear and lucid tones, and with that dignity of manner which was peculiarly his own, began to deliver his opinion, Mr. Gordon and Walter leant forward with eagerness to catch every word that fell from his lips.

There was very little difficulty in doing this, as the Court was hushed, and men seemed to hold their breath while the legal points were separately taken up by him, and his voice was the only one that broke

the otherwise profound, if not oppressive silence.

Having recapitulated the facts upon which the issues in the case had been raised, and dissected the arguments put forward by Counsel, his Lordship concluded by ruling that the acceptances upon which the plaintiffs sought to recover, both on principle and authority were not binding on the defendants as a company constituted for a specific purpose, and not having authority conferred upon them to execute such documents.

Then followed the judgments of the Lord Chief Justice's three brethren sitting with him, each commencing their separately delivered judgments with the words—"I am of the same opinion," but each adding also some new feature to the conclusion at which all had arrived, by terse observations on the case

submitted to them, and on the authorities quoted by Counsel.

Immediately the junior puisne Judge had concluded, the Judges rose, and the majority of the occupants of the densely crowded Court filed out of the public entrance into the Great Hall; and here and there in little groups of twos and threes, and sometimes more, with troubled faces were discussing the merits of the case to which so many had so anxiously listened, and speculating as to the results the judgment thereon might produce.

Mr. Gordon and Walter also hastened out of Court, conducted by Mr Barclay's articled clerk through the same passages by which they had entered.

On emerging therefrom into the street, Mr. Gordon called a cab and directed the cabman

to drive to Mr. Barclay's chambers in Lincoln's Inn.

On arriving there, having dismissed the cab, he and Walter at once proceeded to the clerk's office, and as Mr. Barclay was disengaged, they were forthwith shown into his private room.

"Well," said Mr. Barclay, "my young clerk has anticipated your arrival by a few minutes, though he came on foot."

"We, unfortunately, got 'blocked' in the Strand for several minutes," answered Mr. Gordon, explanatorily, or we should probably have been here before him—I offered him a seat in our cab, but he said he had some papers to leave in Covent Garden, and he would not delay us."

"He tells me," resumed Mr. Barclay, "that the Court will not take another case to-day,

so I am entirely at your service, and now tell me what I can do for you."

"I quite understand, then," replied Mr. Gordon, "that the Court has to-day decided that the acceptances given by the defendants to the plaintiffs, in the case in which we have felt so deep an interest, are worthless; but before I explain how and why my friend Lid-don's and my interest have been aroused, may I ask, for I cannot realize it, if a railway company, who have raised by such acceptances, under their corporate seal to the extent of nearly a quarter of a million of money, are by a fiction of law able to annul them, and escape the repayment of the moneys they have thus raised and received?"

"My dear friend," said Mr. Barclay, with a smile, "this result is not a mere fiction, but a too sober reality in law. This company did

that which we lawyers call *ultra vires*, which, you know, means as the literal translation of the words convey, that the act done was beyond their powers."

"And," interrupted Mr. Gordon, "in consequence of their having done an illegal act, and having given a spurious security, they are enabled to repudiate their liability to pay the hard cash they have received?"

"Yes, I fear so," answered Mr. Barclay; "at least so far as these particular acceptances are concerned."

"I don't know how," said Mr. Gordon, indignantly, "to characterize such proceedings; but it is waste of your time to dwell upon it longer, so I will at once ask your opinion and advice upon the subject respecting which I have come hither to consult you."

“ Both Liddon and I have large amounts deposited with, and are likewise shareholders in one of the firms who were co-plaintiffs in to-day’s proceedings, and who hold a very large amount of the defendants’—the Railway Company’s acceptances.

“ It is rumoured—with what truth I cannot tell—that an immense amount has been raised by the issue of similar paper by other companies, who, to escape payment of the amounts of their acceptances, will doubtless avail themselves of the decision come to to-day; and the result, in such an event, will be to shake the banking community to its very foundations.

“ The simple question then is, ‘ What shall Liddon and I do ? ’ ”

“ Withdraw your deposits *instantly*, ” answered Mr Barclay, “ and dispose of your

shares as speedily as possible at any sacrifice. I know they are not fully paid up, and should the Firm go, the probability is that the unpaid balance of every share will be called up. It is, however, too late to take any steps to-day to carry out the suggestion I have made; besides," he said, turning to Walter, "if Mr. Liddon cannot come to town personally, you should be prepared with legal power to act on his behalf."

"Pray then, if you please, Mr. Barclay," said Walter, "draw up the necessary document, that I may take it to 'Oaklands' on my return to the country to-night. I will then get my father to execute it, and be in town again by the earliest train to-morrow morning."

"Suppose, then, you come and dine with me, Barclay," proposed Mr. Gordon, "at six."

You can then bring the requisite power of attorney for Mr. Liddon's signature, and Walter will have ample time to catch the nine o'clock down train from Paddington."

"I shall be happy to accept your invitation," answered Mr. Barclay, "and will do as you suggest; so good-bye till six, at which time I will be with you punctually."

At that hour Mr. Barclay arrived at Mr. Gordon's residence, with the power of attorney to be signed by Mr. Liddon, and having instructed Walter as to the form in which it was to be executed, he handed it to him.

Nine o'clock found Walter at the Paddington terminus, and he was soon rapidly journeying homewards.

The *perils* of the coming morrow were already casting their dark and murky shadows over him and his parents, and over thousands

of others, whose fortunes were to be annihilated,
and upon whom bitter woe and calamity were
to fall.

God help them in their sore distress !

CHAPTER VI.

“God created man in His *own* image, in the image of God created He him: male and female created he them.

“And God blessed them, and said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and *subdue* it: and *have* dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.”

SUCH is the description given us of man's creation—in His own image God created him!

How perfect, then, must have been our first parents' personal beauty! It were difficult, indeed, even in our imagination, to picture them.

How perfect, also, the noble gifts of mind, as well as of body!

And this man, and this woman, and their progeny were for all time to have dominion over *every living thing*.

Frequent have been the discussions as to where *instinct* ends and *reason* begins.

In the animal creation, the "every living thing" over which man's absolute sway and control were to extend, it is difficult, indeed, to realise from the marvellous instinct displayed by many of them, that *reason* is positively non-existent in them.

But herein would appear to be the great secret of that super-eminent power that has been given to man, and which has enabled him to subdue the most fierce, powerful, and tameless of the brute creation—that however wonderful may be their *instinct*, the *reasoning* faculty is withheld from them; and man's intellect and *reason* centred in the soul, and present in the body, have enabled him to sustain that dominion over them originally conferred upon him.

But how sadly has man fallen from his first estate ; and though his rule is still indisputable, yet *reason* too frequently forsakes him through his own acts of disobedience, and his want of reliance on, and faith in Him who invested him with that tremendous faculty, and he then sinks to the level of the most degraded and miserable of his species.

At the present day, *refined* vice and immorality have crept in amongst us, and were the veil that covers them, flimsy though it be, actually lifted, it might teach man to pause in that most dangerous career of all—the pursuit of *gilded wickedness* !

From it, unquestionably spring, to a very great extent, the crying evils of the day ; and they who practice and indulge in it, are, as the Pharisees of old, “ outwardly righteous-

unto men, but within full of hypocrisy and iniquity.”

Pleasurable wickedness (pleasurable I mean while being indulged in, for it will bear no after reflection) refine it how man may, inevitably tends to the ultimate weakening of his obligations to his fellow-men, and in his dealings with the business part of life, render him reckless of strict honour and integrity—speculations are indulged in, which, if they prove unsuccessful, those who embark in them full well know, must not only ruin them, but what is worse than that, involve many innocent persons in their fall.

Thus the *perils* which now surrounded the Liddons, and so many others, had been brought about; and they were to be sufferers in consequence of other men’s unjustifiable speculations and misconduct.

Soon after the dawn of that sad and disastrous day, the ninth day of May, 1866, Walter Liddon was astir, and as morning broke with a cloudless sky, he quietly stole downstairs, *once again* (how many more times than that *once* would he have the privilege?) to walk in the beautiful gardens at Oaklands.

He, too, thought of man's creation, and of the wonderful trust that was placed in his hands—he thought, too, of his fall and his rapid degeneration from the God-like attributes with which he had been invested, and, of course he thought, too, of the *perils* which threatened the destruction of his home and of his father's fortune.

All nature was beaming with gladness—the lowliest animal seemed to bask with pleasure and delight in the early morning sunbeams—the glistening dewdrops on tree and shrub

around him, with all the prismatic hues of the diamond, seemed to laugh and sing—the very rooks as they cawed amongst their young broods in the lofty trees, appeared to revel in the brightness and brilliancy of nature's gifts.

And man ! what of him ?

How many a wretched and sorrowful heart was to beat ere the evening of that day again fell !

And Walter Liddon—what of him ?

The glorious sunshine and nature's jocund appearance warmed *his* heart, too, with momentary gladness as he thought how beautiful all around him was—when up sprung the reflection as to what the coming day might produce.

The gladness then seemed to be dimmed and blurred—and the thought would force

itself upon him, if man had *dominion* over the lower order of God's creation, there was a compensating balance in favour of that order by its being blessed with freedom from care and the necessity for any thought of the morrow.

But rouse yourself, Walter Liddon, from such despondency ! you, indeed, of all men to place yourself in comparison with that order—with the fowls of the air, with the beasts of the field, or even the sparrow that falleth not to the ground without His knowledge. "Are ye not much better than they ?"

Be proud of and thankful for your power and dominion, your reason and intellect—that you possess a soul to lead you to God, and to look forward to an inheritance of peace and rest hereafter.

Shall threatened *perils*, cares, trials and

troubles beat you down ? How know you that in them do not lie embodied seeds which shall germinate and spring out from them, that shall tend to purify your heart, nay more, possibly culminate in your greater temporal prosperity and happiness even in this life ?

And remember who has said, “ In this world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

And Walter pulled himself together with such reflections.

And Hope whispered to him, “ Be not afraid—forsake Me not ”—and Faith joined in the whisper, and together they assured him that if the aspect of matters was gloomy, the valley of trouble and distress would soon be passed, and as the opposite hill was mounted, the shadows would flee away and sunshine lighten his path.

And he did listen to the whispers—and turned to face whatever he might have to meet with courage and equanimity.

He returned at once to the house, took the power of attorney which had been prepared by Mr. Barclay, and which Mr. Liddon had duly executed on the previous evening, out of his desk, put it in his pocket, and once more started for London with a spirit of hopefulness, though naturally somewhat dashed with anxiety.

He arrived at Mr. Gordon's residence about eight o'clock, and found that gentleman ready to receive him, and the breakfast table laid.

Walter's journey had given him a keen appetite, and he was glad to avail himself of Mr. Gordon's proffered hospitality.

“And how left you your father?” the latter

enquired, as he and Walter proceeded to dispose of their morning meal.

"I am rejoiced to say," answered Walter, "that he continues well, and now this business has been broken to him and he has had time for reflection, his accustomed placidity of manner has returned, and I think he will bear any misfortune that may visit us with fortitude—still," Walter added sadly, "his health is in a precarious state at the best of times."

"Come, cheer up, Walter," said Mr. Gordon, "you know that anticipation usually magnifies coming trouble or danger, and the realization of either is rarely so great as the mind's eye or thought has painted it."

"True," said Walter, "but when neither can be met with a hope or prospect of overcoming it, what then?"

"There is no trouble or suffering common

to man," Mr. Gordon replied, "but what may be greatly allayed and its effects and results minimised by being bravely met and courageously grappled with—as to *anticipating* trouble, the anticipation may be baseless, and like a cloud in the atmosphere, which apparently threatens a storm, is suddenly dispersed, deceiving man's calculation and apprehension—at any rate don't let us at present anticipate that which may never be realized; indulging in this feeling can neither hasten or prevent, more than it can delay or aggravate, any coming evil or misfortune."

"True, again," rejoined Walter; and his speaking features convinced Mr. Gordon that his companion was not the man who would blench or bend in the time of *peril*—"but what appointment have you made with Mr. Barclay this morning?" he enquired, and

added, "I should like him to run his eye over this power of attorney and see that it is correctly executed and attested before I proceed to act upon it."

"I promised that we would be at his chambers at nine this morning," answered Mr. Gordon; "he is a very punctual man, and I think, therefore, we may as well be moving. We shall have time enough," he added, looking at his watch, "if we walk briskly, to keep my appointment at the hour named."

The clock in Lincoln's Inn indicated that it wanted five minutes to nine as Mr. Gordon and Walter emerged from Queen Street into the "Fields;" and truly on this bright May morning they looked light and cheerful, and one might have thought there had been a general meeting of the London sparrows who were

carrying some resolution of importance with vociferous acclamation as they twittered amidst the fresh green foliage of the trees in their centre.

“Well, my friends,” said Mr. Barclay, as Mr. Gordon and Walter, having entered his chambers, were shown into his private room. “I will not complain of your want of punctuality, as you are only about three minutes before your time. You know, Gordon, I have an idea, peculiar it may be, that a man is nearly, if not quite as unpunctual, who is much before an appointment as he who is much after it. This, then, is the power of attorney from Mr. Liddon,” he continued, as Walter handed him the document. “What do you wish me to do with it?”

“Merely,” replied Walter, “tell me if you please, that your instructions as to

its execution have been properly fulfilled."

"It is quite correct," said Mr. Barclay, after a short pause, during which he had inspected the power of attorney.

"And now Gordon," he continued, turning to that gentleman, "say how I can serve you. I quite understand your and your friend Liddon's position in reference to the house in whose stability you are both so largely interested. I don't know that there is any question, or point, calling for any *legal* opinion. The judgment of City men, whose lives are spent in weighing matters of commercial policy—for that is what must guide you here—would be of much greater value to you than any advice I can offer you. It strikes me, however, that one thing is perfectly clear, you should at once withdraw

your deposits, even at the sacrifice of current interest, if withdrawal at call involves such a loss ; and you will be much governed by the spirit in which you are met, in consequence of the act of requiring your money thus peremptorily, as to the disposal of your shares, as you know their price has greatly receded in the market during the past week. What chance or prospect there is, as to their recovery, of course, no one can with any degree of certainty foretell ; it will, however, strike you, as it does me, that the next few days will determine the point. The tone of the market to-day will enlighten us as to the confidence or distrustfulness, as the case may be, in reference to them."

Here Mr. Barclay was interrupted by a somewhat unusually loud knock at his door.

Having received permission to do so, a

clerk hastily entered the room ; he looked flushed and agitated as he handed Mr. Barclay a scrap of paper. He waited until his master had read its contents, and scanned his countenance with unusual interest.

“ How know you this, Thompson ? ” enquired Mr. Barclay, looking up at the clerk.

“ Because, sir, I have just come past the doors, near which, however, I could not get, as the crush of people was something tremendous. I could see, however, that there was some notice affixed to the doors and closed shutters, which every one was striving to reach and read.”

“ That will do Thompson,” said Mr. Barclay, and the clerk retired.

“ And now,” resumed Mr. Barclay, turning to his visitors, as the clerk left the room, “ this information which I hold in my hand,

has come unexpectedly, indeed—we are too late.”

“Too late!” echoed Mr. Gordon and Walter, almost in the same breath, as they both observed the extreme gravity with which Mr. Barclay had given expression to those words.

“I will read what I have here—it is as follows, ‘O and G.’s shutters are up, and from what I could learn from one or two in front of their banking-house, there is no prospect of their resuming business.’ You heard my clerk say that he was an eye-witness of what he has here communicated as to the closing of the bank.”

Mr. Gordon and Walter were for the moment so shocked, that as Mr. Barclay ceased speaking, a painful silence ensued, which was broken first by Walter, who, with

an appealing look at Mr. Barclay's fallen and disturbed countenance, said—

“And can nothing be done?”

“It would be premature, before we know more as to what has really happened, to speculate on contingencies. I will go with you into the City to my brokers. By the time we reach their office they will probably have learned all that is at present to be known, and if any action to your advantage can be afterwards taken, it shall be forthwith.”

Too true was the information conveyed by Mr. Barclay's clerk, Thompson, to his master.

The great company had collapsed suddenly, and it was thought hopelessly, and a panic of fear and unparalleled depression had struck the community, which, as the knowledge of what had occurred became more

diffused, hourly gathered in magnitude and intensity. The telegraph offices could not keep pace with the demands made on them, and though dispatched with alacrity and almost inconceivable rapidity, in some instances messages were much delayed in transmission by the extraordinary pressure upon their resources.

Still all fast enough, heaven knows, travelled with lightning speed the disastrous news that was to carry sorrow and suffering into the bosom of many a family, and which was to break up homes and scatter those who had lived there, bound up in each other by ties of the fondest affection ; to sprinkle them broadcast over the land, and rob them of all those dear home associations which most strongly tend to constitute the earthly happiness of those who possess them.

Surrounding the entrance to and crushing and pressing against an extensive building, situate in the heart of the great metropolis, were hundreds of excited, and irritated, and depressed, and woe-stricken men—this building with closed shutters and drawn blinds was the first source from whence emanated all this excitement and tribulation.

Yesterday, and for years past it had, during business hours, presented a scene of life and animation.

To-day, how changed ! even its external appearance seemed to tell a tale of woe.

And who are these forming the seething and restless crowd, presenting so many varied aspects for a physiognomist's study ?

Look at that group, pressed almost to exhaustion round the door of the great house, with outstretched necks and glaring

eyeballs, breathlessly reading the writing on the blue paper affixed to it.

They have succeeded, after painful efforts to reach the door, in learning from it that which, while on the outer circle of the struggling mass of humanity, they had only heard, but would not credit.

See that grey-haired old man, almost fainting with the exertions he had made to ascertain the fatal truth for himself, just emerging wearily from the crowd, his countenance the picture of despair.

“My little all,” he moans, “irretrievably gone!” He will nevertheless yet hope that it is not all true, and that at least there may be something to enable him to bring his earthly career to a close, and keep the gripping hand of penury from his door for the brief future of life that is for him.

Here and there might be seen men giving way to passionate declamation and gestures, while at rare intervals a face of one who had narrowly escaped being involved in the consequences of the great failure, bore almost a complacent smile at its owner's good fortune.

But the generality of those present appeared as if they were paralyzed, and walked away, so soon as they had freed themselves from the crowd, with bowed heads and sad forebodings at their hearts of what was to follow.

As hour after hour passed away, the crowd never seemed visibly to diminish, for as the suspension of the company became more widely-spread abroad, numbers kept flocking towards and around the house, as if their presence there could elicit something that could not be gleaned or ascertained elsewhere. Still, amongst the ever-changing

crowd, similar faces of despair and woe, mixed with a dekree of incredulity that the doors of the great house were never more to be opened, presented themselves, and consternation at what might next happen pervaded the minds of most men.

Their interview with Mr. Barclay's brokers had yielded Mr. Gordon and Walter little satisfaction or comfort—indeed the result was rather the reverse; for though they had told them that the immense wealth of one or two members of the old firm, who it was said held at least half the shares of the new company which had just closed its doors, and the contributions of the other shareholders would probably, in some measure, if not altogether secure the depositors, yet the circumstance of both Mr. Gordon and Mr. Liddon being large shareholders, as well as depositors,

would, in their cases, cause them enormous loss.

After their interview with the brokers, they, with Mr. Barclay, returned to the latter's chambers; but as it was evident that no step could be then taken in the matter, after a brief conversation, and a promise made by Mr. Barclay that he would keep a watchful eye, so far as he was able, Mr. Gordon and Walter left him, and walked slowly to Hyde Park Gardens.

"What is the real conclusion you have arrived at, upon what we have heard and seen to-day?" enquired Walter of Mr. Gordon.

"Well, Walter," the latter replied, "it is somewhat difficult to say. One thing, however, I fear is palpable—your father and I must be great sufferers—for myself, individually,

though it will make me a comparatively poor man, I could at least patiently bear the loss, though I may find it hard if I have to embark in business again at my time of life ; but I am cut to the quick at your father being involved so deeply," he said with much emotion ; "for I cannot but accuse myself of being in some measure the instrument of his becoming so large a depositor. It is true that on the formation of the new company he involved himself as a shareholder without my intervention or even my knowledge ; and it was somewhat singular that I had also taken a few shares, though not to anything like the figure Mr. Liddon had, and I had never mentioned the fact to him."

"I am sure my father will not condemn you," Walter observed, "because, though it is true you first broached the subject to him

as to the deposit, before making it he has told me that he made full enquiries and investigation, and his conclusions were arrived at from his own personal judgment based upon what he had heard and ascertained. As to the shares, I understood there was a perfect *furor* to obtain them when the prospectus of the new company was issued. I knew nothing as to my father's unfortunate application for them as I was absent from home when he embarked in the company, and indeed had I not been, I probably should not have been consulted, as his reticence about money matters is, if I may call it so, his only peculiarity, and probably it is the only subject which, until just recently, has been a sealed book between us."

"God grant," said Mr. Gordon, earnestly, "that your father's health may not be

affected by this unforeseen and almost incredible disaster—but come in,” he added, as they reached his residence, “and take lunch before you leave town,” and together they entered the house.

Within an hour afterwards, Walter had taken his leave of Mr. Gordon, and was again on his homeward journey.

As he arrived at Reading Station much earlier than had been anticipated, he found no one waiting to receive him, so he determined to walk to “Oaklands.”

The day was still bright and beautiful, and the sun shining in an almost cloudless sky—there was, however, a gentle breeze which tempered the heat of the atmosphere, and prevented it being oppressive.

Walter, on clearing the town, took his way by a footpath across the fields,

which materially shortened the walk to his house.

The freshness and vigour of the spring time of year just beginning to merge into summer, could not but give pleasure to the eye and the senses, and under other influences than those that pressed upon Walter's mind, would have lightened and gladdened his heart, but he could not shake off the depression that weighed down his spirits, when contemplating with dread the effect that the news he had to convey to his father might produce upon him. Then he would again summon Hope to his aid to counterpoise his painful emotions—and for a while his footsteps lingered, as if he would willingly delay the communications it would be his duty to make to his father.

He now approached the plantations which skirted the roadside boundary of "Oaklands,"

crossed over the stile into the high road, and strove to assume, at least externally, a more cheerful air.

As he reached and passed through the entrance-gate to the grounds, he could catch a view of the lawn immediately in front of the house, and his quick eye recognised the figures of his parents—their backs were turned towards him, and they were slowly walking in the direction of the house, now and then lingering at the different flower-beds to admire the beautiful blossoms which had so recently sprung into life and gracefulness.

It was with pain he observed his father's footsteps, as he leant upon his wife's arm; and Walter could not conceal from himself that the vigour of manhood had left him whom he so much honoured and loved, and that his

walk indicated extreme lassitude and weakness.

Suddenly Mr. and Mrs. Liddon turned round, and at the same moment caught sight of Walter, who had in the meantime approached them within some thirty yards without their having previously observed him.

Their faces lighted up with pleasure, and they joyously welcomed their son's return home again.

"Why, Walter," said Mr. Liddon, "you are earlier than I expected. We thought you would have stopped to dine with Gordon, and as you left no directions as to the carriage meeting you at the station, we concluded that on your arrival there you would take a cab to bring you home, but from your dusty appearance it seems you have walked?"

"The afternoon is so beautiful that I pre-

ferred doing so, and the cut across the fields so shortens the distance from the station, that I am here nearly as soon as if I had driven by the road; but how are you to-day, sir?" said Walter, looking scrutinisingly into his father's face. "I left too early this morning to think of disturbing you to enquire."

"Well, Walter," replied Mr. Liddon, "it would be idle for me to attempt to conceal from your professional eye that I am not so well as I was yesterday; I had a broken and restless night, and, strive against it as I may, I cannot get rid of the presentiment, that during your absence has possessed me, of *perils* already casting their shadows upon us—but come in, Walter, and take a glass of wine after your walk; it wants yet two hours to dinner time, and though I have been out

but a short time, I feel weary, and I shall be glad to sit down."

"And now, Walter," continued Mr. Lid-don, after they had taken their seats in the dining-room, "tell me the worst. Your look does not betoken anything of a very cheerful or cheery character; however, I am quite able to bear anything you may have to tell, so do not conceal or withhold anything on my account."

For a brief space Walter was silent, hardly knowing whether it would be better to literally comply with his father's wish, or to break gradually to him the truth, to make him aware of the great and serious loss to which he would probably be subjected; but he was well aware of his father's quick powers of perception, and that even if it were right or prudent to keep him partially in the dark,

he would, indeed *must* discover it; and then suspense would prove more injurious to him than if he were put in possession of the whole facts at once.

During the brief pause, Mr. Liddon looked at Walter with a meaning glance, and then said—

“Come, Walter, I know your solicitude for me, but there is no necessity for you to tell me by piecemeal what you have to say—indeed, let it be as bad as it may, I shall never be better prepared to hear all than I am now.”

“You know, sir,” answered Walter, “that I would not for the world deceive you, but I confess I have hesitated before stating the position of matters; though, after all, ultimately they may not prove so disastrous as at present they promise to do.”

“ Then,” said Mr. Liddon, with perfect calmness, “ to sum them up in a few words, I conclude the company has suspended payment.”

“ Yes,” Walter replied, “ but perhaps,” he continued, “ I had better tell you in detail all that has passed between Mr. Gordon, Mr. Barclay, and myself, and you will then be able to draw your own conclusions on the subject.”

Here Walter succinctly related the result of the interviews he had had with the gentlemen named, and Mr. Barclay’s brokers.

As Walter concluded, Mr. Liddon said—

“ I agree with Mr. Barclay, that it would be premature to attempt at present to prognosticate how it is all to end. A few days will probably enlighten us further, and there is no help for it but patience. We

will hope for the best, and let further discussion, which can produce no fruit, stand over till we know more. So don't look rueful about it, Walter ; the world is all before you, and you are blessed with health, and strength, and talent, to make your way in it, and for the rest, let the *perils* be what they may, it is all in God's hands, and we may be sure that if they do not pass away without leaving losses and sufferings in their track, He will *never* forsake us, so long as we keep our allegiance to Him.

CHAPTER VII.

THE few succeeding days to that on which the world had been startled by the downfall of the great company whose stability had been so trusted in, and for the obtaining of shares in which there had been, on its formation, keen competition, were productive of failure after failure in the banking and commercial community, and suspicion and distrust held sway in most men's minds.

Some two months had passed away since the great crash had occurred, when Mr. Gordon, after having held long and anxious interviews with Mr. Barclay and his brokers,

resolved upon going to "Oaklands," to see his old friend Mr. Liddon, to personally tell him how matters stood, and what were the prospects of the future.

Mr. Gordon was a man, who, having once marked out for himself any definite line of action, always pursued it with energy and decision ; and though his intended interview with Mr. Liddon could not but be painful to both, he braced himself up to undertake it without hesitation.

He had some days previously intimated to Walter, between whom and himself a constant correspondence by letter had been kept up since they had last parted, that he might visit "Oaklands" at any moment, so that he knew his sudden appearance there would not cause surprise.

He had time, he found, to catch the 3 p.m.

train from Paddington, and thither accordingly he at once proceeded.

As he descended from his cab at the entrance to the booking-office, he stumbled as his foot touched the kerbstone, and would probably have fallen on to the pavement, but for a gentleman who was looking at the label on his portmanteau, and directing a porter to carry it to the train.

This gentleman's back was turned towards Mr. Gordon, and the latter, to save his threatened fall, somewhat heavily laid his hand on his shoulder.

"I beg you ten thousand pardons," said Mr. Gordon, "but for your friendly shoulder I might have had an ugly tumble."

"No apologies are needed," replied the gentleman, turning to him with a good-humoured smile, "I am only too happy that

I have, inadvertently, been of service to you ; besides," he added, " I don't think it is the first time we have met, for, if I mistake not, we were fellow-travellers to Reading some time in the spring of last year, and I am indebted to you for relieving the monotony of the journey by your agreeable conversation."

Mr. Gordon, after having scanned the face of the speaker, replied—

" I am then in more ways than one, *your* debtor, for, now you remind me, I have great pleasure in recognising you again, and of reciprocating the sentiments you have expressed with reference to our former meeting. Are you again bound for Reading? "

" Yes," replied Mr. Domville, for he it was, " I am going to Caversham to visit a sister, who is in great trouble in consequence of the recent frightful failures."

"I am sorry that the occasion of your journey has thus arisen, but rejoiced to find that we shall again be companions to the same station; but we had better take our tickets and our seats, as the last bell has rung," observed Mr. Gordon.

Together, therefore, he and Mr. Domville entered one of the carriages of the down train, and were soon speeding onwards, rapidly and smoothly, to their first destination.

Ah! the comfort of the broad gauge of railway those only have appreciated who have travelled on it, and in these days who has not?

It is now a system of locomotion, nearly, if not entirely lost to us, by the cautious and probably judicious conduct of railway directors.

The roomy and lofty carriages of the Great Western Railway Company, and the almost entire absence of the oscillation to which we are subjected on the more parsimonious system, rendered conversation between travellers intelligible, and comparatively easy and audible.

“ You said, Mr. Domville, that your sister at Caversham is in trouble through the bank failures,” observed Mr. Gordon, resuming the thread of their conversation at Paddington. “ I fear greatly that the sufferers from the same cause are almost numberless. I happen, unfortunately, to be one of them ; but what distresses me far more than the loss I have sustained, is the fact that an old and valued friend of mine, whom I am now on the way to see, will be nearly pauper-

ised from being in the same unlucky boat, and that from the injudicious, though honestly intended advice I gave him."

After some further comments by both on the most important topics of the day, Mr. Gordon said—

"Do you know a place called 'Oaklands,' on the opposite side of Reading to Caversham?"

"Well," replied Mr. Domville, after ruminating for a moment, "the name of the place seems familiar to my ears, though I can't say that I know it—stay," he added, putting his hand to his forehead, "I remember. Some two months since I was called from the north into Berkshire to see the husband of my sister whom I am now again on my way to visit—he was then in a very critical condition of health, and, I am grieved

to say, has since died. On my journey back to town, I met a young gentleman with whom, and with whose sentiments, I was greatly pleased. The meeting was a singular one, as it appeared he was an old Harrovian, and had been for some years the schoolfellow and intimate friend of a very wealthy parishioner of mine ; indeed the latter is, in all pecuniary matters, my right hand in administering relief to all around him, and he is one of the most liberal masters in the United Kingdom. From him I had a message to convey to the younger Mr. Liddon, of Oaklands, which, I am ashamed to confess, I failed to communicate until I was on my way homewards—fortunately my companion turned out to be the very man to whom I was entrusted by my parishioner I have mentioned to deliver his message. It is my intention, while in

the neighbourhood to call at 'Oaklands'—the name of which had momentarily escaped my memory."

"Mr. Liddon, the elder, is one of my oldest and most valued friends," said Mr. Gordon, "and it is he, I regret to say, whom I referred to as the man whose losses by the bank failures have caused me so much pain. I purpose staying with him over to-morrow, and if time and opportunity permit, I should be much gratified if you would manage to make your visit before I leave."

"I think I may be able to do so to-morrow afternoon," replied Mr. Domville, "but my call must necessarily be a brief one, for my time is limited, as I have no curate, and my pastoral duties recall me to my parish."

"I shall be glad, and I am sure Lid-

don will be, to see you at 'Oaklands,' I to improve, and he to make your acquaintance."

They soon arrived at Reading, and having warmly shaken hands, bade each other "good-bye."

Mr. Gordon proceeded to, and soon arrived at his friend's house.

He found Mr. and Mrs. Liddon alone—the former, much to his sorrow, looking greatly changed for the worse, and the latter careworn and anxious.

"I cannot tell you," said Mr. Liddon, "how glad I am to see you, Gordon. I have fully prepared myself to meet whatever you may have in store to communicate. Your letters to Walter have led me to conclude that your information will not hold out much hope that I shall escape out of these failures with-

out most serious, if not with absolutely ruinous results."

"My dear Liddon," replied Mr. Gordon, "I cannot sufficiently express to you how deeply grieved I am to have been, in some measure, the moving cause of your thus being involved; but I am sure you will give me credit for having acted in perfect good faith, and with the desire of enhancing, as I conceived, with perfect security, your income."

"You may divest your mind," said Mr. Liddon, "of any impression you possess that I attribute the most remote culpability to you. It seems that had I not, as unwisely as eagerly, sought for and obtained an allotment of shares to a very large amount, I should probably have ultimately come out of the matter almost scathless. This allotment, as you know, I applied for and obtained

without seeking your advice. My information from other sources, during your absence from England, solely induced me to embark in the new company, promising as it did, large and sure profits. I feel I greatly erred, in my precarious state of health, in not being content with a comfortable income, and in thus speculating—for *speculating* it most unquestionably was, with that uncertainty attached to it which did not justify me in dipping into it. But I hear from Walter you also were attracted in the same direction; how came this about while you were in Italy?"

"My brother," answered Mr. Gordon, "was so taken up by the fair promises held out by the prospectus issued with reference to the new company, and identified himself with it so seriously, that I fear he is an absolutely

ruined man. Under the conviction that it was so fine a *speculation*, as you rightly term it, he wrote to me, urging me to allow him to take some shares, which he said he could obtain at *par*, and I, on the spur of the moment, instructed him to apply for an allotment of a few, which he accordingly did; thus I shall, as a contributor, be at a very serious loss—so much so, indeed, that I shall be obliged greatly to reduce my establishment, and possibly go into harness again. When Walter told me that you had gone into the company so extensively, I was not only surprised, knowing your usual caution, but greatly grieved; and one of my principal objects in coming here is to offer you personally, in the most delicate way I can, not only my services to endeavour to pull you through with as little loss as possible, but also such

substantial aid as my altered fortunes will permit me to do."

Mr. Gordon uttered the last sentence with some hesitation, but with deep feeling, and with an earnestness of manner which carried conviction to Mr. Liddon's heart that the words spoken were not formal, but sincere, and that the sentiments of his friend were the promptings of a noble and generous heart.

Mrs. Liddon looked at Mr. Gordon gratefully, while her husband passed his hand over his flushed face, and then said—

"Gordon, this is like you ; but I could not consent to raise or borrow money, which, under the circumstances, I should probably never be able to repay. My life hangs upon a thread, and my strength would not permit me again to enter into business ; and retrench how I may, so far as I can see, our future income

must be a bare means of subsistence. I cannot express how grateful I am to you for your sympathy and proffered assistance; the latter, however, for the reasons I have given, I cannot accept."

"Well, Liddon," answered Mr. Gordon, "I trust I have not wounded your feelings; pray don't excite yourself on the subject—which for the present, let us quit," he somewhat abruptly added, as he observed the agitation which affected Mr. Liddon.

Here Walter entered the room, and having welcomed Mr. Gordon to "Oaklands," said—

"I have been detained by Dr. Ferrers longer than I anticipated. He has promised to join us at dinner; and I am glad," he continued, turning to Mr. Gordon, "that you will be here to meet him, for of course you intend to stay with us until to-morrow."

“Thank you,” replied Mr. Gordon, “I can manage to stay over till to-morrow evening, and I have taken the liberty to press a very agreeable fellow-traveller of mine to-day to carry out his intention to call here to-morrow. It seems that he is the rector of a parish near Newcastle, and his most important parishioner was an old schoolfellow of yours, Walter.”

“You allude, I presume, to the Rev. Mr. Domville,” said Walter. “Singular that you should have met him; you remember, sir,” he continued, addressing his father, “it is the same gentleman of whom I told you, who had been entrusted by Greville with a message for me which he had forgotten to deliver, until our opportune meeting on my first journey to London.”

“I remember,” answered Mr. Liddon—“I

shall be much pleased to see him, and I am under an obligation to you, Gordon, for having asked him to join us here."

At this juncture, Dr. Ferrers was announced. Dr. Ferrers was apparently about fifty years of age; his hair and beard were thickly besprinkled with time's tell-tale visitors, but his step was as firm and elastic as it had ever been.

As he entered the room, he shook hands with the Liddons, and was introduced to Mr. Gordon.

It required no great powers of perception to see that the doctor was a man full of energy and determination; one of those men who rise above their fellows by the possession of that rare gift, perseverance—a gift which is not so often bestowed upon those of natural ability and talent as on those whose intel-

lectual powers are not so keen, and who are only brought to the standard of the former class by persevering and sheer hard work.

How often in life do we see men endowed by Providence with the most brilliant genius, who, as it were, stand still in their worldly career, letting their rare intellectual powers remain dormant, and content to call them into action only when occasion requires that they should rouse themselves from their customary lethargy.

Such men rarely, if ever, rise to that eminence and distinction in the world which are the records of the patient, energetic, and persevering man, who has not been blessed with half their natural talent and ability.

Dr. Ferrers, however, was certainly an example in favour of the exception to this theory.

It was under his tuition and guidance that Walter had acquired his professional education; and he, above all others, had, from personal experience, proved what the world gave his former master credit for—the very highest order of medical skill and acumen.

Walter had been very anxious that the Doctor should see his father, and he was glad that his visit had been so timed as to be present when Mr. Gordon had arrived at “Oaklands,” as he had felt that the latter’s advent, and his recapitulation of all the facts and circumstances connected with the sad disaster that had happened to them, would of necessity produce an extraordinary amount of excitement; and while Mr. Lid-don was thus affected, Dr. Ferrers would be better able, he thought, to form an

opinion as to his condition than if that excitement had been absent.

Mr. Liddon was able to join the party at dinner, and that meal passed off pleasantly and cheerfully.

Shortly after the cloth was removed, as was his custom, he, with Mrs. Liddon, retired to the drawing-room.

Walter and his guests had been chatting for about half-an-hour afterwards, when the drawing-room bell was rung violently.

Walter's quick ear instantly caught the sound, and excusing himself for abruptly leaving the room, passed through the hall with such rapidity, that he reached the drawing-room just as Mrs. Evans was coming out of it.

One glance at her face convinced him that something was wrong, and intuitively he muttered—

“My father!”

Walter found him lying on the sofa, Mrs. Liddon half-supporting him. He was unconscious; and Walter beckoned to Mrs. Evans, who had followed him into the room, to call Doctor Ferrers, while he looked upon the prostrate figure of his father with terrible agony pulling his heartstrings, though he was outwardly calm.

His mother watched his countenance with intense anxiety, as Walter loosened Mr. Liddon's shirt-collar and slightly raised his head.

Dr. Ferrers was by their side within a minute after he had been summoned.

With that entire absence from excitement or agitation which characterises most medical men in the sick room, he first took his patient's hand, and after a brief, but careful examina-

tion of the pulse, he bent his head to the region of the heart.

“Raise him a little more,” said Dr. Ferrers to Walter; and as Walter did so, Mr. Liddon, whose breathing had been for some few minutes perfectly inaudible, gave a gentle sigh, and a faint fluttering pulsation returned.

A quarter-of-an-hour elapsed. Oh! what long-drawn minutes seemed to make it up, as the anxious watchers looked on with the most terrible suspense.

Mrs. Liddon tried to read Dr. Ferrers’ impassable face—it was perhaps a shade more grave, but it gave no other sign.

Who can portray or realise, but they who have watched and waited by the sick bed, and with bated breath have looked upon the fading form—fading away for ever—what crowding memories of the past rush upon them?

And who of these does not chide himself for hard words spoken, or unkind acts displayed towards him who now lies prostrate before his eyes ?

Will those closed lids never open once more ? Will those lips no more part in this world, and is the tongue for ever silent ?

Is there to be no opportunity for that son to tell his dying father of the anguish and sorrow that now sting him for having wounded his feelings and disappointed his hopes ?

If not, then how saddened is that son's after career in life to be, with the ever-recurring feeling that many, probably, have been the hours of pain that he may have caused that good and generous father who lavished a wealth of love and solicitude upon him !

If man—aye, and woman too, would think of such things more than they do, and try to

realise to themselves that the day must most surely come when the final parting on this earth with those whom they should love and cherish, must occur, would it not tend to make them strive to honour them, and to reciprocate their love ere it is too late? Would it not make us all more careful to restrain our angry words and evil passions?

What would many a man give to recall a lost parent, even for a few brief hours, that he might tell him of his deep contrition for his ingratitude and disobedience, his thoughtlessness and indifference—to tell him that when he had parted from the home of his childhood, and became mixed up with the busy world, he had forgotten the author of his being, the tender solicitude with which he had brought up and prepared him to fight the battle of life, and oh! how penitent he

was ; and then, after his confession, to ask and obtain the forgiveness of him whom he had thus neglected, and whose grey hairs he had, perhaps, brought down with sorrow to the grave.

Few men looked and waited with more intense agony than Walter Liddon did for the hoped-for return of consciousness and resuscitation of vital power in that good father, whose unusually long state of torpor alarmed all around him ; but few men ever had less cause to reproach themselves with undutifulness or want of affection towards a parent, than he.

Some few more minutes elapsed, during which Mr. Liddon's breathing became more tranquil, regular, and audible—the eyes gradually assumed a look of intelligence, and recognition of those around him.

At length the lips moved, and Mrs. Liddon bent her head to catch the words which slowly and softly fell from them.

"I am better," was the faint utterance.

"Don't attempt to talk, Liddon," enjoined Dr. Ferrers, as he succeeded in getting his patient to take a little stimulus. "Get a pillow, Mrs. Evans," he added, and she, having brought one, while Walter raised his father's head, the doctor placed it so as to leave him less recumbent.

Mrs. Liddon, by the doctor's directions, wrapped her husband's feet in flannel, and perfect repose and quiet having been enjoined, Dr. Ferrers and Walter left the room.

Meanwhile, Mr. Gordon had sat in the dining-room, leaning back in his chair, with his glass untouched beside him, and enduring the most extreme agitation, which at last became almost

unendurable. Presently he rose from his seat, walked to the door and quietly opened it, as he was unwilling to break the silence of the house by ringing the bell, and in the hope that he might see a passing servant, of whom to make enquiries of Mr. Liddon's condition ; for he felt assured that the sudden summons of Dr. Ferrers, preceded as it had been by Walter's hasty exit, boded sad tidings of his friend.

All was quiet, and a thrill of exquisite pain assailed him, as he turned on his heel, walked to the fireplace, put his elbow on the mantelpiece, and his hand to his forehead, and strove to wait, with as much patience as he could command, the return of Dr. Ferrers and Walter, or one of them, to the dining-room.

They both shortly joined him, and he was somewhat relieved to hear that there was

still life, and, with it, hope of Mr. Liddon being able to rally.

“I will remain, Walter, for an hour,” said Dr. Ferrers, “and see your father again before I leave—though I don’t know anything I can do for him can be of much service—nature must fight it out, and it is all in God’s hands. You know, as well as I do, that perfect repose and as much freedom from excitement as it is possible to secure, must be regarded.”

At the expiration of the hour, Mrs. Evans informed them that her master was sleeping calmly, so Dr. Ferrers determined not to disturb him, and bidding Mr. Gordon and Walter “good-night” as he left, he promised to be at “Oaklands” early the following morning.

Walter did not retire to bed until the first

dawn of day, nor without having several times during the night quietly stolen into his father's room.

After his last visit thither, and on his return to his own bedroom, he threw up the window and looked out on the tranquil scene presented to his view, and as the landscape became more clearly defined as the sun heralded its rising by painting the eastern sky with beautiful and varied tints, his heart was elevated to the God who he felt assured would order all things for the best.

After meditating, as he could not but do, upon this last domestic *peril* which threatened more trial and trouble than all other *perils*, he sought comfort and support in *prayer* to Him whose ears are ever open to the petitions of the humble and afflicted ; then, having partly undressed, he threw himself on the

bed to seek that repose of which he stood so much in need, and with his last thoughts fixed on his father, as he closed his eyes he murmured with a devotion which most assuredly carried his prayer with lightning speed to the Throne of Grace, "Spare him, Oh Heavenly Father, yet a little while to us, for Jesus Christ's sake!"—and with this prayer on his lips he slept.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE sound of wheels on the gravel of the carriage-drive awoke Walter from a brief slumber.

Dr. Ferrers had kept his word; it was barely seven o'clock when Walter gladly welcomed him almost as soon as he had entered the house.

"Well, Walter," he enquired "how is your father?"

"He was still calm and quiet, when I left his bedside at four this morning," Walter replied. "He enjoined me in a few words to go

to bed—his pulse was regular, though somewhat feeble—and as he evidently was disposed to sleep, I left him, and have not yet been to his room since—but here comes Mrs. Evans who will tell us how he is.”

From her they learnt that almost immediately after Walter had left his father, he had again fallen asleep, and had continued in an unbroken slumber till the sound of the wheels of the doctor’s carriage had also roused him; and that having enquired and been told of the doctor’s arrival, he had desired to see him and Walter at once.

“Ferrers,” said Mr. Liddon, as they complied with his wish, and entered his room, “I thank you very much for this early visit.”

Dr. Ferrers took his hand, and answered —
“I am very gratified to see you thus, and now while leaving you to the care of your

good wife and Walter, I need only simply say, what you know as well as we, that you must keep yourself free from all excitement and exertion, and I think it may be a very long day before you may require to see my *professional* face again."

As Walter accompanied Dr. Ferrers to his carriage, the latter said—

"It is almost miraculous to see your father so much restored. You are aware that these attacks to which he is subject, may, and probably will, end fatally and suddenly; still, if nature continue to fight for him as she has now done, that event may not happen for some years to come—his system is much enfeebled, but such care and attention as I am well assured he can safely rely upon, may assist greatly in propping up his strength. I need not tell you, for I know your plucky spirit too

well, to look at the calamity which has visited you all, without despondency. As your father has told you, life is before you, and your talent and perseverance will carry you safely through, and will enable you to at least secure the future comfort of your parents, a labour of love which I am certain will prove a grateful one to you—you had better not leave home to-day—I can do without you,” he laughingly added, “and, so good-bye !” and the cheerful and cheery doctor sprang with the activity of a young man into his carriage, and, as he closed the door, directed his coachman to drive home.

The day wore on, and Mr. Liddon continued calm and tranquil.

Towards the afternoon Mr. Domville made his promised call ; he spoke much of Edward Greville, praised his care for those who were

around him, and laboured and toiled, not only for their own subsistence, but as he had the sense to know and appreciate, as well for *his* aggrandisement.

“ But,” observed Mr. Domville, as he pursued the conversation with Mr. Gordon and Walter relative to Greville, “ with all his liberality and generosity towards his men and their families, and his ever open hand, which is at all times ready to relieve the sick and needy, it is incomprehensible to me that he persistently ignores all outward semblance of religious sentiment. His natural leanings and inclinations towards much that is so admirable and commendable, seem to prove that his disposition is such, that it requires only the right chord to be touched to make him realise the fact, that whatever disassoci-

ates religion from man's actions is a grave and serious error.

“ To achieve true happiness in life, the best of actions must be accompanied by the innate feeling that they are and have been performed as a duty, not only to man but to God. The opportunities afforded, nay almost forced upon Greville, to do good, are very great, but, if in dispensing his gifts amongst those who are far beneath him as regards worldly wealth, and still farther in intellectual acquirements, he fail to let the recipients understand that they are not made for ostentation and from pure good nature only, but as a fulfilment of his duty to God, he neglects a means of practically instilling a precept of religion which might prove of even more value than his gift. It is certain

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that he has not been blessed and endowed with his store of wealth for nothing beyond his mode of applying it, creditable though that may be.

“It has been said, that the glory of the Creator, in the external and manifold world, is to be seen, not in one object here and there, but in every object it contains ; and the glory of the Creator is man, who is the crown of His creation ; and although it may be seen more in certain faculties and capabilities of his nature than in others, yet is it to be seen in them all, and it is the due and effective employment and development of that nature, with all its capabilities, which constitutes the full idea of the whole duty of man in the world in which he is to live. It is the idea of that *whole* duty which is wanting in Greville. He seems fully to grasp a very

large part of the idea of his duty to his neighbour, and, to the extent I have mentioned, he practically illustrates it—herein exists the contradictions in the influences which operate upon his mind, that he has got thus far, and no farther, towards fulfilling his duty to God.”

“I cannot help thinking,” observed Mr. Gordon, “that in the present day there is much of this spirit pervading men’s minds. It seems to me that this is mainly attributable to pride, and too much self-reliance, which lead first to carping at the great truths of Christianity, then to unbelief, and finally, on the banishment of the little faith such men previously possessed, to practical atheism.”

“Or, freethinking, as it is termed,” suggested Walter, “for though such men claim

the right to ignore the Bible, the only revelation to man of the existence and nature of the Godhead, and the only written evidence of His Omnipotence and power, as well as of His love and mercy, they would probably be startled to be charged with being atheists."

"Yes," continued Mr. Domville, "doubtless such a charge would not be palatable to them, for, rely upon it, their natural sense tells them that, with all their self-reliance and boast of intellectual power, they are tossed about with doubts and apprehensions as to whether they haven't made a mistake, and then must inevitably come two questions, which will force themselves upon them to answer. 'First, supposing all that the Christian religion teaches be true, I have grievously erred, and how, then, shall I fare for my unbelief? And secondly, how shall I

retrace my steps, obliterate the past, and act for the future?' At this juncture pride steps in, and spurns such thoughts, which, if they had been longer and more seriously dwelt upon, might have led to good results ; and yet they would not entirely deny the existence of a Divine Being—that they think would be going too far, blindly overlooking the fact, that by their rejection of any guide for their creed, save their own limited and fallible faculties, they are in practice justifying the appellation of atheists."

" But does my old schoolfellow, Greville, still, as in his early days, take refuge in an absolute refusal to enter upon the question of religion ?" enquired Walter, of Mr. Domville.

" I am really grieved to say," the latter replied, " that I cannot induce him to touch

upon it, and I confess that my efforts to lead him up to the subject have hitherto been profitless."

"But I cannot conceive," observed Mr. Gordon, "that such a man as you describe him to be in other respects, can continue in this condition. With a kind and generous heart, and a sympathising disposition towards others, he will, in time, assuredly see what terrible consequences may accrue from the force of his example to his dependents and others by his line of conduct."

"Well, yes, yet he seems alive to the importance of education, but he does not appear to see that children should be educated to be Christian people," said Mr. Domville.

"One of the most learned, as well as one of the most earnest of our prelates, has recently expressed his opinion that it would

be better to leave children in the darkness of ignorance, than to give them light which had no light of heaven in it; and that he believed we may educate as much as we like in human learning, but by this means we shall not really raise the mind in the smallest degree, if we have not cultivated in it Christian knowledge; for the more we shall have given of the intoxicating streams of heathen learning, the more it should have been purified by the waters of the Gospel of Truth."

"And I venture to think," observed Walter, as Mr. Gordon paused, "it was further said by the same authority, for I read his speech, from which you have quoted, with great interest, that the future of the nation was full of danger, and in all probability of evil, if we were raising education, and were not mingling with it that which

could alone give it real worth and value in the sight of God and man—to look upon early education as a matter of little importance, and to train a young soul in mere human learning, and doing this substantially without Christian knowledge, seemed one of the greatest errors we had fallen upon in this nineteenth century of extreme enlightenment.”

“Opinions and sentiments in which I think we all agree,” remarked Mr. Domville.

“And observations specially applicable, I am afraid, to Greville,” continued Walter, “for though in his early education religion was of necessity a most important element, he never approached it save with apparent reluctance, if not with positive dislike.”

“But,” said Mr. Domville, “he cannot put forward the plea of ignorance of the

truths of the Gospel—it is an inconceivable blindness and hardness of heart, and an anomaly indeed, utterly incompatible with his natural disposition in other respects; but,” added the speaker, turning to Walter, “on your father’s restoration to health, which I sincerely trust may speedily be accomplished, I hope you will come amongst us. Greville always speaks of you in terms of brotherly regard and esteem, and I feel confident that if any one could influence him to think of these things, you are the man.”

“I have looked forward for some time past,” responded Walter, “to the day when I might accept Greville’s oft-repeated invitation, but my natural apprehension in reference to my father’s condition, together with the distressing circumstances which the recent commercial failures have produced,

will, for the present, prevent my doing so—but will you tell Greville, I will write to him in the course of a few days?”

“I will,” Mr. Domville replied, and added, “I shall be anxious, as doubtless he will be, too, to hear of Mr. Liddon’s progress; believe me he will have my sincere wishes and prayers that his recovery may be both speedy and permanent.”

“I am grateful to you,” said Walter, as he shook hands with Mr. Domville, who rose to take his leave of him and Mr. Gordon.

“And now,” said the latter, as Mr. Domville left the room, “what, Walter, do you propose to do in the future?”

“It is clear,” replied Walter, “that we shall have to give up ‘Oaklands,’ and retire to a place of more modest pretensions; our establishment must be reduced; and I

must look for a field for practising my profession."

"Need you go far to seek for such a field?" Mr. Gordon asked, "surely Dr. Ferrers would be glad to retain your services; and if he did not immediately take you into partnership, he would at least give you an adequate stipend."

"He would, I think, do so, but for the circumstance of his having a most promising son, who has just passed his final examination in the medical schools with distinguished honour, and as Dr. Ferrers has a large family, he will expect his son to work; besides, I think in our altered circumstances, we should all like to leave this neighbourhood, where so many reminiscences of the past will be forcing themselves upon us, which cannot fail to pain my father and mother."

After further conversation with Walter, in the course of which Mr. Gordon renewed the generous offer he had previously made to Mr. Liddon, to aid and assist him and his family in any way he could—they parted—Mr. Gordon having first ascertained that Mr. Liddon was so much better that he was able to leave his bed.

The tints of autumn had begun to exhibit their beauty by the diversified colouring of the foliage, and the Liddons still lingered at “Oaklands,” but the time, alas ! was at hand, when their parting from it was to wring their hearts with pain, as they should bid farewell to the many familiar scenes and favourite haunts which they had so long frequented ; and strangers were to cross the threshold of that home endeared to them by the happy

days they had passed there, honoured and respected by all around.

Never again were they to look upon the cherished objects which surrounded them as old familiar friends ; and as Mr. and Mrs. Liddon and Walter paced up and down the avenue, a feeling of unquenchable sadness pervaded their hearts.

Here and there a single leaf fell in little eddies at their feet ; and, as they walked, their thoughts fell into a similar vein, as each in silence pondered over their changed fortunes and the mutability of all things earthly.

The falling leaf which had performed its allotted work in beautifying the plants that now cast it off to perish, was typical of men's condition—in his affluence and health, admired by the world and courted by its flatterers—

reduced to poverty, shorn of all the attractions he once possessed, abandoned, despised, and left to perish unlamented.

And such is life ! yet how few there are who realise this phase of it, save those who have fallen from position and wealth into penury and obscurity.

Little do those men across whose path a shadow has never cast its gloom, ever dream of the humiliation which saps the foundation of all hope of that man who, after the toil of years has, from the force of circumstances which he could not control, been deprived of his hard-earned savings.

Much less do they realise how deeply such a man's grief is enhanced by the coldness and want of sympathy of those who, in the days of his prosperity, felt it a privilege to call him their friend ; or how, at last, the spirit that

had once been so brave is for ever broken, until it passes away to seek that rest which it so much needed, in a land where peace and happiness for ever reign, and all earthly distinctions are unrecognised.

Mr. Liddon's step was more firm, and his general appearance indicated much improved health, and his wife and son rejoiced at and thankful for his restoration, though, as we have said, saddened by their contemplated departure from "Oaklands," were resigned to their altered fortunes; while Mr. Liddon, contented with their love, and with a confidence engendered and fostered by his reliance on a Higher Power, that they would never want so long as they continued to put their trust in God, was calm and tranquil.

The lengthening shadows told them of declining day as the sun's parting rays gilded

the whole surrounding landscape with a flood of golden light, and the western horizon momentarily assumed the most beautiful hues ere the great fountain of light and life should be for a while shut out from the opposite hemisphere, and the mellow twilight flung around its soothing influences.

“And so, at length,” said Mr. Liddon, “you have finally arranged with Mr. Cowdry that we shall give up the house at the expiration of a fortnight from to-day—is it not so, Walter?”

“Yes,” replied the latter, “and that the sale of such portions of the household furniture as you intend to dispose of should take place, say in ten days time, and he is to be here at eleven o’clock to-morrow to take particulars for the catalogues, and to receive your definite instructions.”

“All the details I must leave to you, Walter,” said Mr. Liddon; “and you, my dear,” he continued, turning to his wife, “will let Walter have a schedule of the articles you wish to be retained and warehoused.”

“It is already completed,” replied Mrs. Liddon, “and I have ordered the cases to be made in which they are to be packed. Johnson has promised to deliver them the day after to-morrow, and to come over with a furniture van and remove the things to the Repository.”

“Then,” suggested Walter, “as I can now attend to everything that is further required to be done here, don’t you think it will be wise for you to start for Weston-super-Mare to-morrow?”

“I think so,” replied Mrs. Liddon, with a

sigh—"if we leave by the ten train we shall reach Weston early enough to look round the place, and possibly secure lodgings."

The morrow opened drearily, belying the promise of the previous evening's sunset, of a fine day; the small fine rain was falling like the proverbial "Scotch mist," yet it was one of those mornings which thus beginning with tears, frequently preludes a change to brightness and sunshine at noon.

At the hour of Mr. and Mrs. Liddon's departure from "Oaklands," however, the aspect of all around was gloomy; the rain drops were depending thickly from the branches of the trees, scarcely quivering in the stillness of the atmosphere, and the surrounding scenery was partially obscured in a thin white mist.

Mr. and Mrs. Liddon bore up bravely against the distressing feelings which could

not but assail them while parting from that home where they had hoped to have ended their earthly career, and so Walter felt relieved at the moment, as he, with his placid smile, bade them "God speed" to their intended destination.

As the carriage disappeared behind the plantation, he stood for a moment under the porch, almost vacantly gazing around.

He felt his loneliness ; and the painful duties which devolved upon him, and which stared him in the face, were anything but calculated to dispel the gloom in which circumstances and the outward aspect of nature seemed to envelope him.

With a powerful effort of the will, he braced himself up to proceed to fulfil them, without further indulgence in the memories of the past, or approaching the task he

had undertaken in a vacillating or infirm spirit.

He first made his way to the stables to give directions to the groom as to his horse, the only one that had been retained, the other horses and the carriage having been sold and taken away some days previously.

The appearance of the vacant coach-house and empty stalls gave him a twinge; and the merry whistle of the groom—who was sitting on an upturned bucket, just inside the stable door, plaiting straws—rather jarred upon his senses.

As the groom caught sight of Walter, he ceased his whistle, and, standing up, respectfully saluted his young master.

“Good-morning Thomas,” said Walter, “I am afraid your plaits will no longer

be needed here, as I have arranged with Mr. Cowdry to let the mare go to grass until I want her again, and I hope to get away from here within the next few days. I think your notice to leave does not expire for nearly a fortnight, but you can take her to Mr. Cowdry's this afternoon; as he will be here presently he will tell you where to leave her, afterwards come to me, and I will pay you your wages, so that you may go into your new service, where I am sure you will find my friend to whom I have recommended you, a good master."

"Thank you, sir," responded Thomas, gratefully, "and if, sir, you should soon want a groom again," he added, throwing down the straw plait, and thumping his open hand with his closed fist, "to follow you, or master, or missis to the ends of the

earth, Thomas is the man—and there isn't a fellow-servant of mine as won't do the same, I'll be bound."

"You have always done your duty, Thomas," said Walter feelingly, as the groom rubbed the back of his rough hand across his eyes, "and if you should be out of place, and I should want a groom, you may rely on it that I will not forget you."

When Walter re-entered the house, its forlorn and forsaken appearance was not calculated to raise his spirits, and he had now to perform the very painful task of paying and discharging the remaining servants, the housekeeper, Mrs. Evans, only having been retained, and having accompanied Mr. and Mrs. Liddon to Weston.

They had gathered together in the kitchen, and with closed doors were lamenting in

hushed tones the change that was to scatter them, and with tearful eyes they recalled and recounted to each other all the kindnesses and sympathy of those whom they had served for so many years, and in whose service they had been treated as Christians and members of a united family.

Walter had thrown himself listlessly into a chair, and there he sat, with closed eyes, ruminating over past events, pondering and wondering what was to be his future, and that of his beloved parents ; then his thoughts would follow them, and he became weary and anxious about his father, but, with his confidence and trust in God, he was not the man to long sit and despond, much less despair, and so he exclaimed, supplementing his silent cogitations, “ but it may be as well that I should go through the next part of

my painful task ; it is almost as hard as any other portion of it—to dis sever the ties which have from my childhood subsisted between us and our old and faithful servants.”

He rang the bell—it was answered by the grey-headed old butler, who, as he entered, looked sorrowfully and anxiously at Walter, on that face that had so long shed a benign influence on him and all around him.

Walter’s emotion kept him silent for more than a minute, as Johnson stood at the entrance of the room, grasping the handle of the door with a grip that betrayed his efforts to be calm, and to force back the exhibition of the distress which so deeply affected him, and which gave additional throbs to the beating of his heart ; and as the thought flashed through his brain that he was to part, perhaps for ever, from him who in his

childhood he had nursed and caressed, his breathing came thick and fast, he felt he could not stand it much longer; would not that sorrowful face of him he loved so well look at him and give him some hope, some comfort!

Ah! what agony is sometimes concentrated into one minute of time, and in what a brief space does the mind recall events of the past, and thus it was with loving, affectionate old Johnson. In those few short moments, while he stood waiting for Walter to speak, he had recalled the time when he—good man that he was—had related Bible stories to a little child, who, while he listened, had looked up into his face with loving eyes, frequently suffused with tears, as he told of Abraham's faith and obedience to the Divine mandate, and Isaac's release from a

position the child's youthful fancy had painted as perilous ; and how cruelly Joseph's brethren had treated him, and the child's delight at Joseph's future career, and his ultimate reunion with his family ; and still those thoughts had not exhausted the flying moments with the same rapidity and distinctness Johnson had traced the growth of that child, his arrival at man's estate, and then his kindness and gentleness to all, his devotion to his parents, and his respect and consideration for all, and he still kept his eyes fixed on the object of all these thoughts—his young sorrowful master, Walter Lid-don.

At last Walter looked up, and said, " Johnson, I cannot tell you how grieved I am to be obliged to apprise you of that which you may perhaps have suspected—that in

consequence of the necessity which has arisen for us to reduce our establishment, and to our great distress, even to part with 'Oaklands,' you must leave our service; for in our altered circumstances we shall have to economise in every way we can. It is not the least bitter part of our affliction that this sheer necessity compels us to sever our relations with our old and faithful servants, except Mrs. Evans. It is the more distressing to us, remembering as we do all your devoted service, and personally do I most deeply feel that you and I must part, as I call to mind our association from the time that I could first lisp your name."

"Oh! don't *Master* Walter," as Johnson was always privileged to call him when alone with him. "Don't," he said, with streaming eyes, for he could no longer restrain his

pent-up feelings, "I cannot bear it, my poor old heart will break."

Here the good old man could not restrain the impulse, he caught Walter's unresisting hand between both of his, and looked beseechingly in his eyes, as if he would have him recall his dismissal.

"Do not unman me, Johnson," replied Walter. Johnson, however, could not at once recover his equanimity; he had heard of the sale of "Oaklands," and had witnessed the departure of Mr. and Mrs. Liddon with an aching heart, and now was it come to this that *he* must go, and that his path was to be no longer the same as theirs; bitter, bitter trial!

If his life had depended upon his being silent, he must *now* have his say.

"I *cannot* leave you, Master Walter. I

have no relatives in the world, and you and yours are all on earth who care for me and upon whom I have placed all my love—and” continued the old man with his simple eloquence, “I have saved some £500; I do not want to burthen you—take it all if it is of any use to you, but spare, oh! spare me the anguish of parting from you,” there he fairly broke down.

Walter tried to nerve himself as best he could during this affecting scene, but it was with great difficulty he said—

“Johnson, God bless you! Say no more just now, I, like you, cannot bear it. Leave me for the present, and though I cannot accept the care of your hard-earned savings, I will turn it over in my mind whether it may not be feasible, when we once more get settled, to at least have you near us; believe

me, it is as hard for us to part with you as you evidently feel it will be for you to be separated from us."

Johnson's heart was too full to say a word more, but he squeezed Walter's hand, which he had retained in his during their affecting interview, and with untold gratitude for the glimmer of hope that Walter had given him as to the future, left the room.

Shortly after, Mr. Cowdry, the auctioneer, arrived, and Walter had next to undergo the ordeal of giving him detailed instructions as to the disposal of the furniture.

It seemed to Walter like parting with and casting off old friends; but as Mr. Cowdry was apt and quick in his business, the necessary particulars were, to Walter's relief, speedily noted for the catalogues.

When Mr. Cowdry had partaken of luncheon

and arranged with Walter as to the days for the sale, he took his leave, and Walter proceeded with his task of settling with the servants, which, having completed, he put on his hat, and telling Johnson he should not be home to dinner, started off at a rapid walk, with the intention of calling on Dr. Ferrers to apprise him of his intended movements, and seek his advice as to the future. He felt relieved that he had got rid of a good deal of the work he had to perform at "Oaklands," and as the exercise quickened his pulses, he looked, without despairing, to encounter the *perils* of the future.

CHAPTER IX.

AT "Holmsley Park," in the county of Northumberland, resided Edward Greville and his only sister.

It was a lordly property; the mansion stood on an elevated spot in the centre of an extensively and finely-timbered park, and commanded beautiful views of the surrounding scenery.

A few days after the Liddons had finally given up "Oaklands" to its new possessor, and Walter had joined his father and mother at Weston-super-Mare, Greville was sitting

in his library, opening his morning letters, which had just been delivered.

His figure and appearance betokened a man of robust constitution, and full of healthful vigour. He looked an energetic, though thoughtful man; his forehead was high and broad, and gave evidence of intellectual power, though his habit of continually reaving it had already impressed indelible lines upon it; the mouth and chin were covered with a thick dark moustache and beard, so that those usually important indications of character were not discernible.

“Walter Liddon’s handwriting, by Jove!” he exclaimed aloud, as he took up, and read the address on the last of his morning’s letters, “so he has at last, though tardily, kept his promise made to Mr. Domville.”

The words had hardly escaped his lips, and

he had just opened and read the first sentence of Walter's letter, which he held in his hand, when the door opened, and a bright young face met his view as he looked up enquiringly to discover the intruder.

It was his sister, who entered the room with a light and elastic step, crossed over to where he was sitting, kissed him, and gave him the usual morning greeting.

"Well, Helen," said her brother, after returning his sister's salutation, "I have a letter from Walter Liddon at last; I had barely opened it when you came in; let us see what he says for himself," he added, as he took up the letter, which, on his sister's entrance he had laid on the table.

An almost imperceptible blush, unnoticed by her brother, stole over Helen Greville's face as she replied—

“I am very glad indeed to hear it, as I have been so anxious to hear of Mr. Liddon’s condition.”

Greville rapidly perused the opened letter, and, after a brief silence, abruptly ejaculated—

“God help them !”

“Amen,” solemnly and fervently interposed his sister as she looked at him in astonishment, mingled with alarm—astonishment at *his* thus giving vent to his feelings, and alarm lest it portended very sad tidings of the Liddons.

“What is it ?” she eagerly enquired. “Is Mr. Liddon worse ?”

She scanned her brother’s features with curiosity, too, as she observed, first, their expression of sympathy, and then, as a sudden change flashed across them, of apparent vexation.

After a pause, during which he returned Helen's scrutinising look, he said rather confusedly—

“No; Liddon is much improved in health, but he is, I fear, irretrievably *ruined*—has given up ‘Oaklands,’ sold most of its contents, and retired into lodgings at Weston-super-Mare, in Somersetshire; Walter is on the look out for a practice, and, in his usual happy way, hopefully expresses himself as to the future.”

Helen still kept her eyes fixed upon her brother with the same curious expression as before, though she seemed somewhat relieved at the communication that Mr. Liddon's health was improved.

Edward Greville appeared to be unable to meet his sister's look, as he dropped his eyes, and said quite testily—

“Let us go to breakfast; you don’t seem to be quite satisfied with what I have told you. What further do you wish me to say?”

Though he asked the question, which was, perhaps, somewhat peculiar, he was conscious that there *was* a further query his sister wished to put to him, and what that was.

“I will tell you presently,” responded Helen, as she moved towards the door, and, without further comment, invited him to follow her.

“Another of your homilies, I suppose,” he muttered, as he rose from his chair, and went with her into the breakfast-room.

During the whole time they were occupied with their morning meal, their conversation turned to the subject of the Liddons’ misfortunes; but there was a restlessness in Edward

Greville's manner, and at times a hesitation in his speech, utterly foreign to his nature; and the usually clear and lucid style of his conversation was unsteady and broken.

His sister's quick apprehension perceived and noticed all this, attributed it to the right cause, and fondly hoped that an awakening conscience had at last been aroused in him.

After a while both relapsed into silence; Greville moodily took up his newspaper, and throwing himself into an easy chair was soon, to all appearance, intently occupied in reading it.

Helen rang the bell, and ordered the breakfast table to be cleared.

When this had been done, and the servant had retired from the room, she took a chair, placed it opposite to her brother's, and sat down.

He fidgeted about on his seat, but still read on.

“Edward,” she presently said, “please put down your paper and look at me—I want to ask you something.”

“What is it now?” he enquired, as he complied with her request. “I suppose you want me to take you to Newcastle to-day—I really can’t do so,” he hurried on with volubility, as if anxious to evade his sister’s question, “I have several important appointments to which I must give my personal attention, and afterwards I have to go to the colliery—and, by-the-by Conway is coming here this morning to look at ‘Goldstone’ who, though so good a horse in the field, has lately become unaccountably vicious—he nipped John in the back yesterday, and the bite might have proved serious. Conway will ride over, and

why not order the horses and have a gallop with him ? ”

Helen, who up to the conclusion of her brother's last sentence had sat patiently listening without interposing a word, here flushed up to the eyebrows and answered indignantly—

“ You know, Edward, I much dislike Sir John Conway, and I will not have him thus thrust upon me.”

The angry expression passed from her face, however, almost as soon as it had appeared, but her brother detected a quivering of her eyelids, and as the ever expressive grey eyes changed with the rapidity of thought, and she looked at him with a little more than the usual moisture in them, he said with kindness, though laughingly, “ You are a very little spitfire, sister of mine ! Well then, Conway

will, of course, call ; at least offer him the accustomed hospitality, and be civil to him."

"Edward, I trust I never shall so far forget myself as to neglect the ordinary courtesies of society," she replied a little proudly.

"Nay, nay, my dear girl," said Greville, kindly, for he was very fond of his sister, "do not think I would pain you for the world—forgive me if I have unwittingly and unintentionally done so."

The pleasant and genial smile that broke over her face satisfied him that he needed no further assurance of pardon, and he resumed—"Now we are friends again, tell me what is this apparently grave matter about which you want to talk to me—you must be brief, as I have little time to spare, but I will hear what you have to say, though I will not promise to answer you now."

He looked at her apprehensively as she replied—

“Your kind heart and generous nature, my dear brother, wrung from you this morning more than an ordinary expression of sympathy for the Liddons, it was apparently a *feeling prayer!*” she hesitated a moment, as Greville’s face assumed a stern aspect, but as he remained silent, she continued—

“Yes, a *prayer*, Edward—oh! forgive me for presuming to ask you whether you really meant what you said, ‘God help them?’”

He knitted his brows, and the seams in his forehead became more furrowed, but he answered her not. Here, then, was the man justly proud of his worldly wisdom, of his classical acquirements, and keen sense of probing men’s minds and actions, fairly abashed

by the simple question of a young, inexperienced, and unworldly girl—a question actuated by her affection for him, and for a reply to which she looked with trembling anxiety—and still the moments passed and no reply came.

Notwithstanding the sincere affection she entertained for her brother, Helen Greville stood somewhat in awe of his anger, which, in justice to him let it be said, he rarely exhibited towards her, but she blenched not now at the knitted brow, the stern look, and the compressed lips—still he was silent.

Deeply moved, she at last took his hand, and with inexpressible tenderness, said—

“Dear Edward, if you will not answer my question, promise me that you will *think* of it—I cannot and will not believe that in your heart you really deny God—nay, I will hope

and pray that this day shall prove a memorable one, as having initiated the development in your spirit of *the* light which you have hitherto smothered."

Her brother still passively submitted to Helen's grasp, and a thrill of hope possessed her heart that he would not turn from her in anger as had been his wont whenever she had striven to induce him to approach the subject of religion.

Emboldened, therefore, by his silence, she continued with exquisite pathos—

"Oh, Edward, there is no summer without its being preceded by spring, nor day, until the dawn has first brightened the eastern sky; but the summer, with its rich gifts, follows the first awakening of nature from its winter's slumber; and the sun in its meridian glory

is the sequence of the first dawn of early morning."

"Stay, stay, Helen," said Greville, who unbent his brow and relaxed his features, "you will overwhelm me with all this symbolism and imagery—what have you been studying, and whence have you gathered those very pretty sentences?"

Then he looked at her with a smile, and continued—"I am, I suppose, to consider the 'spring' and the 'dawn' as representing in me something which gives promise of bringing forth fruit, and further enlightening my hitherto darkened vision?"

"Nay, do not jest, dear Edward, but give me the promise I have asked of you."

"Well, well," he said, rising from his seat, "I have no time to enter into a theological

discussion now, speak to me on the subject at a more convenient season."

"But only tell me," she rejoined, "that you *will think*."

"Think, you little goose, I am always *thinking*—but I must be off," he somewhat abruptly added, "and do not expect to see me till six, so take care of and amuse yourself as best you can in the interval."

When her brother had left her, her thoughts followed him as she reviewed what had just passed between them, and weighed in her mind their brief conversation.

And what was the result of that review? It was this—that as for the *first* time he had listened patiently to her gentle pleading, she would hope that he would speedily understand that he had been created for something more

than seeking worldly profits and the pursuit of ephemeral pleasures ; and then, having recognised his *dependence* upon the supporting hand of his Creator, he would discover that though he had hitherto lived and acted upon influences and motives of duty, a supernatural motive had not found a place in his breast.

So Helen Greville prayed that her brother would ponder over what had taken place between them on that morning, and that her own life might be brightened too, by the assurance that he had become a Christian.

And with the hope that her prayer would be answered, with more joyousness of heart than she had for some time experienced, she put on her garden hat, and went out with her scissors in her hand to cut off the many dead flowers in her favourite beds, which the cold nights of the late autumn month had withered.

She had been engaged in her occupation for nearly an hour, when she was roused from it by an approaching figure on horseback, and she at once recognised the rider as Sir John Conway.

As he neared the spot where she was standing, he took off his hat, and bowed courteously.

“Good morning, Miss Greville,” he said with a smile, “your brother called upon me on his way to Newcastle to-day, and mentioned that he had told you of my intended visit and the purport of it. I will, with your permission, ride round to the stables, and get John to saddle ‘Goldstone’ for me, as I purpose giving him an hour’s work.”

Helen, after returning Sir John’s bow, replied—

“I believe, Sir John, my brother has

directed the groom to attend to your wishes. On your return here I hope you will come in and take lunch."

"Thank you," he answered, with a gratified look, "it will give me much pleasure to do so," and again bowing, he passed on to the stables.

Sir John Conway was a man verging upon forty years of age; he was the fourth baronet of his race, the only surviving son of his parents, and, with his title, had likewise inherited a handsome fortune. He had never married, but so far as his hard nature permitted him to do, he had, or thought he had, fallen in love with Helen Greville—a sentiment which she by no means reciprocated, though her brother, as we have seen, rather encouraged his attentions to her.

The world believed, and Edward Greville

concurred, that Sir John Conway's wealth and rank pointed him out as an eligible match; but in Helen's frequent intercourse with him, she had, with an acuteness of perception that was peculiarly her own, probed and tested his ideas and notions, and had found them far below the standard which she had marked out as essential in the man on whom she could place her affections, and to whom she would entrust the guidance and protection of her future in life.

She dreaded lest her brother's evident encouragement of Sir John's attentions would lead to a proposal on his part, and that her refusal of his suit might create a breach between her brother and herself. Yet, rather than yield, she was determined to have it out with him, and she had faith in his generous nature and affection for her, that if a

breach occurred between them, it would be but temporary, and that it would soon be healed and forgotten. Still the matter troubled Helen Greville; she discontinued her gardening operations, and, after taking a few turns on the lawn, went into the house.

She was much pleased when, shortly afterwards, Mr. Domville and his daughter called, and she felt still more relieved when they accepted her invitation to stop to lunch, and that Mary Domville promised to spend the afternoon with her, for, to tell the truth, she had felt very uncomfortable at the idea of having alone to entertain Sir John Conway.

